

March
2024

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ANIMATIONTM M A G A Z I N E

**A Fearless Friendship:
DreamWorks'
Orion and the Dark
Flies High on Netflix**

**FOX's and Bento
Box's Grimsburg**

**Paramount's The
Tiger's Apprentice**

**The Second
Best Hospital
in the Galaxy**

**Nickelodeon's
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The Tiger's
Apprentice

Nickelodeon's
Rock Paper
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DreamWorks'
Orion and
the Dark

The Second
Best Hospital
in the Galaxy

\$7.95 U.S.



Grinning with
Grimsburg:
Meet FOX's New
Small-Town Sleuth

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ANIMATED FEATURE

ADG AWARD
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PROD. DESIGN
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6 VES AWARD
NOMINATIONS INCL.
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NOMINATION
SOUND EDITING
ANIMATED FEATURE

6 ANNIE AWARD
NOMINATIONS INCL.
BEST FX IN ANIM. FEATURE
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AS WELL AS THE POWER OF LOVE."

CNN

"DIRECTOR PETER SOHN HAS CRAFTED

THE STRONGEST CHARACTER-DRIVEN NARRATIVE

WE'VE EVER SEEN IN A MAJOR ANIMATED MOVIE."

CINEMA BLEND

"THIS MODERN KIND OF LOVE PROVES IRRESISTIBLE."

Los Angeles Times

"SPECTACULARLY STUNNING."

Daily Herald

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ELEMENTAL

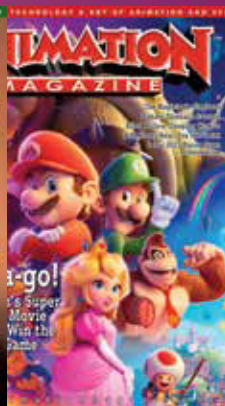
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BEST ANIMATED FEATURE



All the Animation Highlights at Your Fingertips!



Which one did you miss?

Visit our past issue archives and order your copies at
www.animationmagazine.net/category/archives/

FRAME-BY-FRAME

ANIMATION PLANNER

February

THE MUST-HAVE LIST

MASTERS OF THEIR OWN (PUBLIC) DOMAIN

Ten other animated characters that will join Mickey Mouse and Winnie the Pooh in the public domain in the near future.

FEATURES

A LITTLE NIGHT MAGIC

Director Sean Charmatz and producer Peter McCown discuss the creative thrills of bringing DreamWorks' new feature, *Orion and the Dark*, to life.

POUNCING ON A THRILLING ADVENTURE

Director Raman Hui offers us an insider's look at the world of Paramount's *The Tiger's Apprentice*.

TELEVISION/STREAMING

LOVING THE DEFECTIVE DETECTIVE

Grimsburg's exec producer and showrunner Chadd Gindin talks about the inspirations and challenges of bringing the new FOX primetime show to animated life.

SURGEONS IN SPACE

The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy delivers great humor and feeling out of aliens in need of medical attention — stat!

THREE TIMES THE FUN

Kyle Stegina and Josh Lehrman introduce us to their hilarious new Nickelodeon show, *Rock Paper Scissors*.

A NEW PROBLEM-SOLVER IS BORN

The creators of the new animated series *Lyla in the Loop* give us the scoop on their charming PBS Kids toon.

ANIME

FIVE GATEWAYS TO AN EXTRAORDINARY MIND

The new Masaaki Yuasa Blu-ray collection from Shout! Studios offers a glorious dive into the world of the brilliant Japanese auteur.

EVENTS

IT'S TIME FOR TOON TOWN'S BIGGEST NIGHT!

The 51st Annie Awards promises to be another entertaining celebration of animated achievements.

YOUR ANIMATION AND VFX OSCAR BALLOT!

SHORTS

CANINE CORNER

Director Preet Tender discusses the art and influences behind his Oscar shortlisted project, *Dog Apartment*.

VFX & TECH

CHARTING A CRASH COURSE

A look at the realistic VFX details of J.A. Bayona's acclaimed feature *Society of the Snow*.

TECH REVIEWS

All about Procreate Dreams and Maxon's updates to Cinema 4D and Redshift.

DAY IN THE LIFE

DAY IN THE LIFE OF

Producers Kate Kondell and Halima Lucas shine a light on the making of *Marvel's Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* Season Two.

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FEATURES

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Director Sean Charmatz and producer Peter McCown discuss the creative thrills of bringing DreamWorks' new feature, *Orion and the Dark*, to life.

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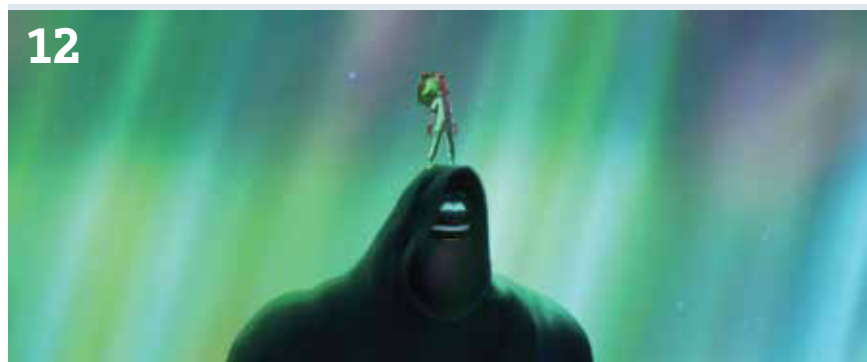
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VFX & TECH

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A look at the realistic VFX details of J.A. Bayona's acclaimed feature *Society of the Snow*.

44



COVER A: DreamWorks Animation movie *Orion and the Dark* lights up the screen on Netflix Feb. 2.

COVER B: Supernatural sleuth tale *Grimsburg* joins the FOX Animation Domination lineup Feb. 18.



Winter Debuts and Animation Celebrations

Despite all the seismic changes happening in the entertainment world, there is no shortage of new animated shows and features being served up for audiences in 2024. A passing glance at the upcoming calendar proves that we have over 30 animated features announced for theatrical and streaming release this year. (You can get the complete list of projected titles on our website.) With big-budget

titles such as *Kung Fu Panda 4*, *The Garfield Movie*, *Inside Out 2*, *Despicable Me 4*, *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim*, *Transformers One* and *The Wild Robot* on the calendar, it looks like the animation industry and its loyal fans are going to save the world once again.

Obviously, streaming services continue to prove a fast and safe alternative for big animated features. This month, two major movies – DreamWorks' *Orion and the Dark* and Paramount's *The Tiger's Apprentice* – will premiere on Netflix and Paramount+, respectively. We have two excellent articles by our regular contributors Jeff Spry and Devin Nealy about these two hot February releases in this issue. The directors of the movies, Sean Charmatz and Raman Hui, were kind enough to share interesting insights about their influences and the challenges involved in helming a big studio project in the current climate.

While it's a quiet month in movie theaters, there are several new shows popping up on streamers and traditional TV outlets. *Grimsburg*, the newest member of FOX's Animation Domination Sunday club, is one of the February newcomers. The show, which had a sneak peek on the network in January, centers on the adventures of the world's "messiest detective," voiced by none other than Jon Hamm, who is also an exec producer. We had the chance to talk to both Hamm and showrunner Chadd Gindin for this month's magazine, and we hope you enjoy what they revealed about their latest prime-time venture.

The adult animation train races full steam ahead, thanks to another new show, premiering on Prime Video, titled *The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy*. Created by the very talented Cirocco Dunlap, the offbeat and unique-looking show centers on two alien best friends who are also famous intergalactic surgeons. Our own Karen Idelson chatted with Dunlap and production designer Robin Eisenberg to get the full picture on this promising new show. Interestingly, both *Grimsburg* and *The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy* snagged two-season orders even before their premieres.

The month of February wouldn't be the same without another entertaining night of celebration at the Annie Awards. The 51st edition of this event is slated for Feb. 17 at UCLA's Royce Hall, and we can't wait to see all the fantastic industry veterans and newcomers in the spotlight. We caught up with ASIFA-Hollywood's president Sue Shakespeare and exec director Frank Gladstone to find out what's in store this year. Sadly, Frank told us that this is the last year he will exec produce the awards, as he is stepping down from his ASIFA position in March. The good news is that he will still be an active board member of the organization. On behalf of everyone in the animation community, we'd like to thank Frank for all his hard work at ASIFA and his undeniable passion for the art and business of animation. Make sure you tell him how much you appreciate him if you run into him at the gala event.

Ramin Zahed
Editor in Chief
ramin@animationmagazine.net

QUOTE OF THE MONTH



"My producers and I were watching the announcement in a hotel lobby in Barcelona. When we heard '... *Robot Dreams*,' we jumped out of the sofa and screamed and screamed until the hotel staff came running to warn us about the noise. We told them, 'We are nominated for the Oscars!' and they also started screaming with us ... The Oscars are the

biggest film influencer in the world, so this nomination means that cinema lovers from all over the world are going to discover *Robot Dreams*. And this is not Robot's dream, but mine, and of all the people who worked on the film."

— *Robot Dreams* director Pablo Berger

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NIMONA



**THE ANIMATED
FEATURE
OF THE YEAR.**

GENUINELY NECESSARY."

San Francisco Chronicle

**"A VIVID CREATURE
ALL ITS OWN.**

At its heart, it's a pointed allegory about politicians who build their national profile on the backs of queer and transgender children.

Nimona the character doesn't claim to speak for them, but does try to speak to them and to others grappling with the concept of *what it might feel like when your shell doesn't match your soul.*"

The New York Times



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Animation Planner

February

1 Season 2 of Max Original reboot *Clone High* introduces new amusing genetic copies voiced by Jermaine Fowler, Paul F. Tompkins, Jackée Harry & more!

2 The oil-paint animated feature *The Peasants* gets its pre-Oscar theatrical outing in L.A. today through Sony Pictures Classics. Netflix debuts *Orion and the Dark*, an animated take on Emma Yarlett's kids' book. On Paramount+, another adapted tale – *The Tiger's Apprentice* – delivers a martial arts fantasy featuring Henry Golding. Disney+ drops the first stop-motion Pixar SparkShort, *Self*, while Disney TV shines more Black Girl Magic with *Marvel's Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur Season 2*!

9 The Pixar theatrical re-release series continues with *Turning Red*!

11 Pablo Berger's *Robot Dreams* is nominated for four **Goya Awards**, held in Spain tonight. [premiosgoya.com]

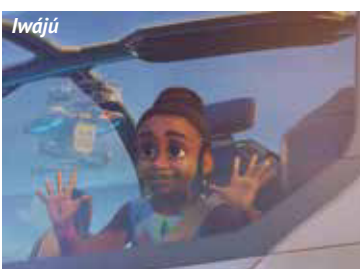
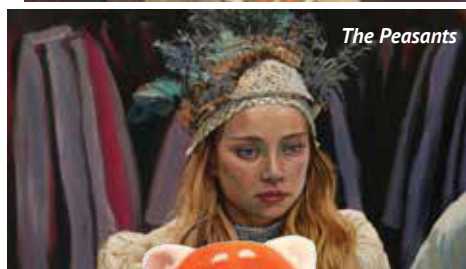
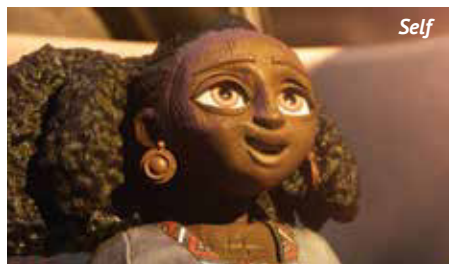
12 Super-competitive BFFs join the Nickelodeon lineup in new original *Rock Paper Scissors*.

15 The artists who bring VFX magic to screens are in the spotlight at the **22nd VES Awards** tonight in Beverly Hills. [vesglobal.org]

16 Celebrate a pioneering *Peanuts* character in *Snoopy Presents: Welcome Home, Franklin*, now on Apple TV+.

19 The accolades race continues in London, which hosts the **EE BAFTA Film Awards** tonight. [bafta.org]

21 The final season of *Star Wars: The Bad Batch* blasts off on Disney+.



22 Fans can stream Netflix's live-action incarnation of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* today.

23 Following its limited engagements a few months ago, Fernando Trueba & Javier Mariscal's *They Shot the Piano Player* tunes up a nationwide theatrical release through Sony Pictures Classics. On streaming, kids of all ages can meet the new trainer-heroes of *Pokémon Horizons: The Series* (Netflix), while adults can enjoy the cut-ups in *The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy* (Prime Video).



51st Annie Awards! Don't forget to cast your ballots between Feb. 10-19. [annieawards.org]
It's also the night of the **Producers Guild Awards**. [producersguild.org]

25 Animation's biggest night arrives with the

28 *Iwájú*, co-produced with African studio Kugali, brings Disney+ viewers into a futuristic Lagos, which can be further explored in the documentary *Iwájú: A Day Ahead*. ♦

February Festivals & Markets

Anima (17-26) | Brussels, Belgium | animafestival.be

Animac (15-18) | Lleida, Spain | animac.paeria.cat

European Film Market & Berlinale (16-26) | Berlin, Germany | efm-berlinale.de

To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail edit@animationmagazine.net.



OUR 2024 ANIMATION TRADE-SHOW CALENDAR IS HERE!

Keeping track of all the many animation and vfx shows and events each year is a lot easier with ***Animation Magazine's*** annual trade-show calendar.

Download our 2024 calendar, filled with great images and helpful info about all your favorite toon events and trade shows of the year.

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Paprika

Limited Edition SteelBook. Bonus: New interview with Nobutaka Ike (art director), Michiya Katou (cinematographer & CG director), Satoshi Hashimoto (color designer), Shinichi Kita (re-recording Mixer) & Dai Kaneda (HDR colorist) [Sony | \$46 | Feb. 20]



Please Hug Me

Show your worrisome love for Becky Sloan and Joseph Pelling's beloved, bizarre musical dark-comedy *Don't Hug Me I'm Scared* with new plush toys from Kidrobot [\$17 each, \$50 three-pack | pre-orders open] and apparel from Hot Topic, like this colorful Tony the Talking Clock tee [\$31-\$33]. The merch is created by Becky & Joe themselves with designer Berto Fojo.

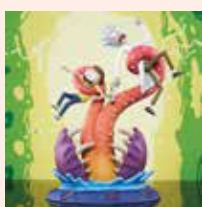


The Tune

New Blu-ray restoration of the 1992 feature from the Academy Film Archive. Bonuses: New hour-long interview with director/writer/producer Bill Plympton, composer/co-writer/voice actor Maureen McElheron & voice actor Daniel Nelden • New commentary track by animation producer/podcaster Adam Rackoff and podcaster/film critic James Hancock • New essay by film critic Walter Chaw • Archival commentary with Plympton and McElheron • Animated shorts *Your Face*, *How to Kiss*, *Guard Dog* & *The Flying House* [Deaf Crocodile | \$35 | Feb. 20]



Top Shelf Rick and Morty



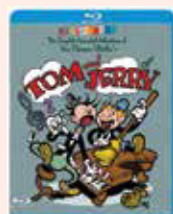
Bide your time through the long year with no new season (and the shorter wait for *Rick and Morty: The Anime*) by adding to your interdimensional decor with the new Deluxe Gallery Diorama from Diamond Select Toys. The PVC piece, designed by Joe Allard and sculpted by Casen Barnardi, sees the mad scientist and his unfortunate grandson caught in the forked tongue of a strange monster. [\$75 | pre-orders open]

Hanna-Barbera Superstars 10

Films: *The Good, the Bad and Huckleberry Hound* • *The Jetsons Meet the Flintstones* • *Rockin' with Judy Jetson* • *Scooby-Doo and the Ghoul School* • *Scooby-Doo and the Reluctant Werewolf* • *Scooby-Doo Meets the Boo Brothers* • *Top Cat and the Beverly Hills Cats* • *Yogi and the Invasion of the Space Bears* • *Yogi Bear and the Magical Flight of the Spruce Goose* • *Yogi's Great Escape* [Warner Archives | Blu-ray | Feb. 20]



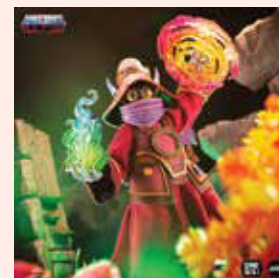
The Complete Animated Adventures of Van Beuren's Tom and Jerry



Twenty-six cartoons produced between 1931-1935, restored for Blu-ray from the best-known 16mm and 35mm prints. Bonuses: Gallery of publicity materials • Booklet with liner notes on the films & creators [Thunderbean | \$23]

The Ultimate Orko

For the *Masters of the Universe* fan with a healthy tax refund in pocket, Mondo and Mattel have teamed up for a timed edition 6.5" scale figure, complete with a scepter and fabric robe as well as a slew of swappable hands and portraits, including the never-before-produced unmasked Orko. (He's also got legs, apparently!) Designed by MOTU expert Emiliano Santalucia, sculpted by May Thamtarana and painted by Mark Bristow, the Trollan magician is accompanied by mini-figures of Classic Orko, Dree Ellee and Daimar as well as an adorably alien stuffed animal. [MondoShop.com / The Drop | \$235 | pre-orders open] ♦



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Masters of Their Own (Public) Domain



Ten other animated characters that will join Mickey Mouse and Winnie the Pooh in the public domain in the near future.

- By Michael Mallory -

Despite a decades-long fight to postpone the inevitable, New Year's Day saw Mickey Mouse entering an entirely new form of existence: as a character in the public domain.

Well, sort of, anyway. Having debuted in 1928, Mickey has now outlasted the legal 95-year term of copyright, at least in the rudimentary form in which he appeared in *Steamboat Willie*. Subsequent versions of Mickey, however, remain under protection.

But a host of other classic characters are also coming up for public-domain status within the next several years, while a few, including Koko the Clown, Felix the Cat and Farmer Al Falfa, have already gotten there. (Ironically, Farmer Al was denied a cameo in 1988's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* because of a rights issue.) Some of Toon Town's biggest names and/or most significant characters in the art form's development will find themselves openly available to the public at large before you know it, including:

1. Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. Walt Disney's first name-above-the-title star, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit very quietly slipped into the public domain in 2023. An early experiment in personality animation, Oswald was created by Disney and Ub Iwerks in 1927, but they lost control of the character the following year — hence the creation of Mickey. Oswald still enjoyed another decade in film through Walter Lantz Productions and was reacquired by Disney in the mid-2000s, appearing in a new short cartoon in 2022, which was his final private year. (A live-action-animation hybrid horror take on Oswald is arriving later this year!)

2. Bosko. Before Warner Bros. hit the cartoon big-time with such major stars as Bugs Bun-

ny, Porky Pig and Daffy Duck, they had Bosko. Created by Hugh Harman in 1928, Bosko first appeared the following year in Harman and Rudolf Ising's cartoon *Bosko, the Talk-Ink Kid*. Given that Bosko was the kind of stereotypical, racist caricature that is not tolerated today (he was replaced by a white clone named "Buddy") his lapse into PD this year will likely not matter very much, historical relevance aside.

3. Popeye. Created by cartoonist E.C. Segar in 1929 for the newspaper strip *Thimble Theatre*, Popeye made his film debut in the 1933 Fleischer cartoon *Popeye the Sailor* and became enormously popular. Although his basic form and name will edge into the public domain in 2025, the trademark stream-of-consciousness mutterings and signature theme song that characterized him on screen will remain under protection until 2029. In some forms (such as his eye-white redesign), the Sailor Man might even go beyond that.

4. Betty Boop. Created specifically for animation in 1930 by Max Fleischer and legendary animator Grim Natwick, cartoon sexpot Betty Boop was initially a dog ... literally! A year later she was humanized and would go on to rival Mae West as a Depression-era sex symbol. A flapper with a helium voice, Betty's initial career spanned the 1930s, but she has become an iconic character and merchandising figure. Her earlier canine incarnation will enter the public domain in 2026.

5. Flip the Frog. Maybe only the hardiest of toon heads even know about Flip the Frog, who was created in 1930 by Ub Iwerks and released through MGM. Definitely a pre-Code property, the downtrodden amphibian and his sometimes-bawdy misadventures only lasted three years, after which Iwerks returned to

the Disney studios (where he'd earlier helped to develop Mickey Mouse). Those cartoons jump-started the careers of many future animation legends, including Irv Spence, Shamus Culhane and Chuck Jones. The frog flips into the public domain in 2026.

6. Pluto. Mickey Mouse's pet hound debuted in the 1930 Disney cartoon short *The Chain Gang*, but was not yet named. He became "Pluto" in 1931's *The Moose Hunt*. Pluto remains nearly unique within the cartoon realm in that he is not anthropomorphized and does not talk. His unnamed version will slip into PD in 2026; as Pluto, he will go public the next year.

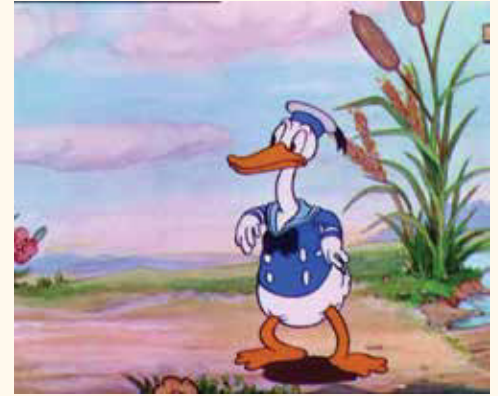
7. Goofy. Disney's lovable Goof (yes, folks, he's also a dog!) will likely generate some extra court filings from the company's lawyers in 2028 when the character as we know him may or may not fall into the public domain. The prototype for Goofy, a chortling caricature of an old-timer called "Dippy Dawg," first showed up in the 1932 short *Mickey's Revue*. Although his voice was established, he didn't recognizably become Goofy until 1934, which may prolong his private status by a couple years.

8. The Three Little Pigs. Released in 1933, this milestone Disney cartoon huffs and puffs its way into the public domain in 2029. What will be the significance of that? For one thing, Edward Albee's groundbreaking 1962 play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was denied permission to use the cartoon's signature song for parody purposes and was forced to substitute *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* instead. Starting in 2029, new productions might not face that restriction.

9. Donald Duck. Arguably Disney's second-most popular classic character, the mush-



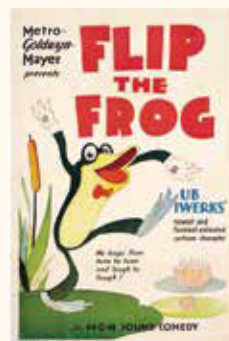
GOLDEN OLDIES: New and upcoming arrivals in the public domain world are Oswald the Lucky Rabbit (opposite page), Betty Boop, Donald Duck, Bosko, Goofy, Porky Pig, The Three Little Pigs, Pluto, Flip the Frog, Mickey Mouse in *Steamboat Willie* and Popeye.



mouthed waterfowl with anger-management issues first appeared in the 1934 short *The Wise Little Hen*, where he's seen fully formed, named and costumed, and teamed with "Peter Pig" (who had a brief, largely forgotten career). Because of this, Donald will slide into PD mostly intact in 2030.

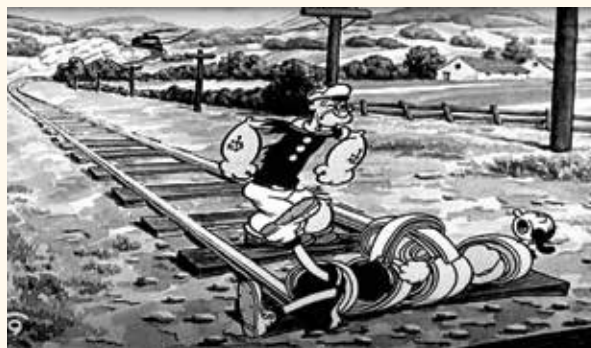
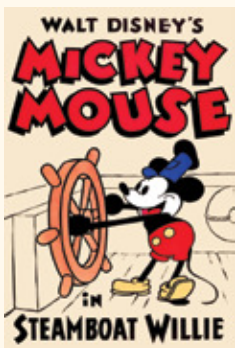


10. Porky Pig. One of Warner Bros.' most popular cartoon characters and the spokesman for the studio's trademark signoffs, the stuttering porker made his first appearance in 1935's *I Haven't Got a Hat*, back when *Looney Tunes* were little more than a creative way of plugging the studio's song catalog. Though Porky's form has changed considerably over the decades, his original design, name and oft-parodied voice will enter the public domain in 2031.



While such other cartoon superstars as Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry, Mighty Mouse and Woody Woodpecker still have a decade or more before worrying about public availability, today's critics are citing as a cautionary tale the 2023 feature *Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey*, a controversial slasher film that capitalized on the recently-made-public characters of Pooh and Piglet. Last month, we saw the trailer for a horror film titled *Mickey Mouse's Trap* about a group of friends that are attacked by a killer dressed as Mickey, Nightmare Forge's horror game *Infestation 88* and Fumi's *Mouse* game featuring a *Steamboat Willie*-inspired gangster mouse. It might not be a bad idea for studios to start strategizing now before *I Haven't Got a Chainsaw: Farmer John's Revenge* is announced. ♦

Michael Mallory is an award-winning author and journalist whose many books include *Universal Studios Monsters: A Legacy of Horror*, *Marvel: The Characters and their Universe* and *Hanna-Barbera Cartoons*.





A Little Night Magic

Director Sean Charmatz and producer Peter McCown discuss the creative thrills of bringing DreamWorks' new feature, *Orion and the Dark*, to life.

- By Jeff Spry -



A phobia-ridden young boy must face the primal power of darkness in the absorbing new DreamWorks Animation fantasy-adventure *Orion and the Dark*. This entertaining jewel, which premieres on Netflix this month, is imbued with a rare purity, showcasing organic storytelling unburdened by the modern conventions of 21st century politics, social agendas, cellphones and the white noise of social media. It simply hunkers down confidently to present an urban fairy tale centered on Orion and his fear of the dark, and how he and the personification of that lightlessness bond over a wondrous night of discovery.

Helmed by Sean Charmatz in his directorial debut and overseen by pro-

ducer Peter McCown, this old-fashioned CG feature crafted by Mikros Animation (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem*, *PAW Patrol: The Mighty Movie*) replicates the handcrafted charm of old-school claymation with textured backgrounds carrying an illustrative touch.

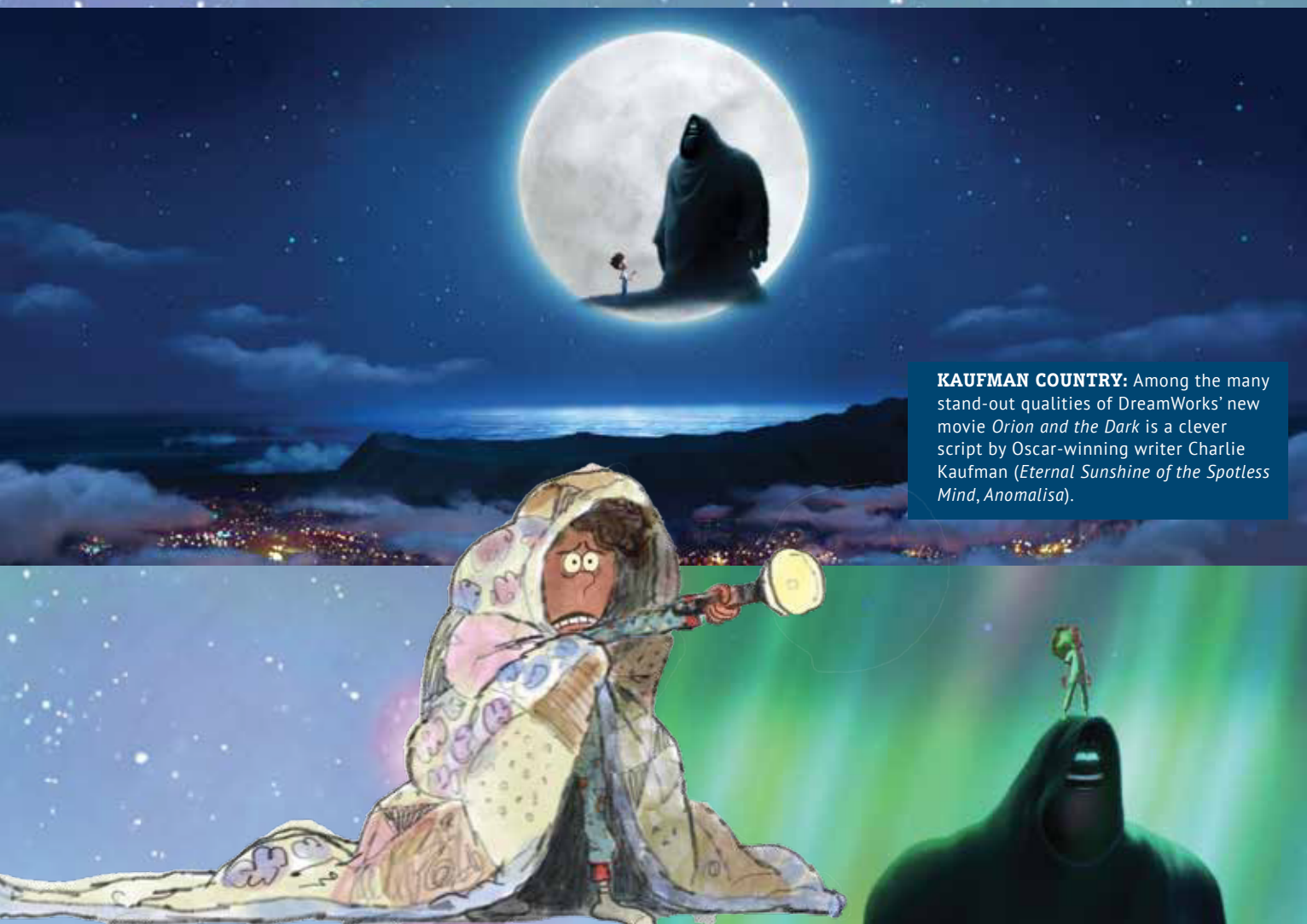
A Sublime Screenplay

The material, which is based on Emma Yarlett's 2014 children's picture book of the same name, is elevated by the quirky humor of screenwriter Charlie Kaufman (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Being John Malkovich*). In Kaufman's hands, the fable blossoms with surprising scenes that convey a panoply of emotions that should greatly enrich



'I think it's the tone of the *Orion* script and the uniqueness and the fact we create a character called Unexplained Noises that speaks to my wanting this as an artist, to make things we've never seen before.'

- Director Sean Charmatz



KAUFMAN COUNTRY: Among the many stand-out qualities of DreamWorks' new movie *Orion and the Dark* is a clever script by Oscar-winning writer Charlie Kaufman (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Anomalisa*).

both youngsters and adults. Anyone who's followed his inventive genius down any number of cinematic rabbit holes understands Kaufman's trademark brand of storytelling magic.

Accented with memorable music by Kevin Lax and Robert Lydecker and a vocal cast that includes Jacob Tremblay, Paul Walter Hauser and, yes, even the stentorian delivery of the great Werner Herzog, *Orion and the Dark* was definitely a dream gig for Charmatz and McCown.

"I'm a huge Charlie Kaufman fan," Charmatz tells *Animation Magazine*. "If I could pick who I could direct a movie of their writing, it would be Charlie Kaufman. I remember seeing *Eternal Sunshine* and just loving that movie. I think it's the tone of the *Orion* script and the uniqueness and the fact we create a character called Unexplained Noises that speaks to my wanting this as an artist, to make things we've never seen before. And the theme is something that's very important to me as I continue to work on being an adult, being

in the moment and knowing that fear is a part of life but not letting it ruin everything."

McCown (*Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous*, *The Epic Tales of Captain Underpants*) had a similar reaction when first told by DreamWorks about this Kaufman-written animation project, and it took zero effort to convince him to climb aboard.

"I went to film school and Kaufman is our darling," says McCown. "We literally spent one of my screenwriting classes studying his writing and, specifically, *Eternal Sunshine*. That's the Mount

**NOCTURNAL ADVENTURES:**

Orion (voiced by Jacob Tremblay) meets **Dark** (Paul Walter Hauser) and his friends **Sweet Dreams** (Angela Bassett), **Sleep** (Natasia Demetriou), **Unexplained Noises** (Golda Rosheuvel) and **Insomnia** (Nat Faxon).

Olympus of screenwriters right there. We got to make *Orion* in a way that was bucking a four-quadrant movie. We didn't have to make a global family consumer products film; we were with Netflix. We got to take a little bit of chances, and I think that's a perfect marriage for something like a Kaufman script. He took a beautiful and very charming book by Emma and kept the spirit there of this kid who's dealing with something that we all can relate to, whether it's fear or whatever. I think Kaufman is great for this type of animated space because of how whimsical he can get. The script itself was just so much to play with."

Orion and the Dark is Charmatz's first feature film directorial effort after working in various capacities on a variety of movie and TV projects (*SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Trolls World Tour*, *The LEGO Movie 2: The Second Part*, *The Angry Birds Movie 2*). Besides nominations for a Daytime Emmy and an Annie Award for writing and directing episodes of *SpongeBob SquarePants*, he is also famous for his viral hit series *Secret World of Stuff*.

"I love movies where I'm surprised as a viewer, and this movie genuinely surprises the audience," he notes. "I don't think anyone is going to know where the storytelling is going. And at the same time, make it funny and emotional, but surprise is really important to me."

To conjure up the specific alchemy for this film, Kaufman took the raw source material of Yarlett's award-winning 40-page book and injected his own wild sensibilities and peripheral perspectives.

"That's the adaptation he brings so brilliantly, because he's a parent himself, and I think he wanted to insert some of that into this," adds McCown. "The book is basically about a boy who's scared of the dark who meets the character of Dark, who takes him around the night to show him not to be scared. That's what Charlie had to work with. Everything else he layered, and we were able to add to it and bring it to a whole different dynamic. I just saw one of the big studios' new animated releases and I knew exactly what was coming and knew exactly what to expect. Sean protected [the film] timelessly so well, and we didn't want to add in any irreverent gags."

Great care and love were also put into molding *Orion and the Dark*'s sublime soundscape and sentimental score, something that's guaranteed to prompt audiophiles to wish for a vinyl release sometime in the foreseeable future.

"They did it so well," Charmatz recalls. "I was so proud of it. One thing that helped this movie for me is that we all had a really clear vision of what we were doing, and that helps everyone along the

way. The editors, who were building the movie before we even worked with the sound people, they jumped on that vision starting from the first storyboard screening, and they were feeling the score even though it was just 'scratch.' When we got to the music guys, it wasn't like, 'Let's all figure out what the music is now.' We got what we were doing and added to it. Oftentimes in animation, they say, 'We're laying the tracks as the train is going.' In this movie the tracks were laid, and everyone was given the space to focus on making great art."

Giving their movie an evocative soundtrack was a component that McCown felt was essential to bolster the inherent emotions in Kaufman's heartfelt script.

"We had such a great editor who was very musical himself, and he helped us build ideas," he explains. "We pulled from Elfman and Williams and Desplat to build this rough track in temp, and it translated so well with the composers that did such a phenomenal job in the time they had. It was just really cool to see it come together."

DreamWorks outsourced *Orion*'s actual production work to the acclaimed Paris-based studio Mikros Animation, whose lively claymation-style CG was interspersed with playful, sketchbook-like fantasy sequences.

"A lot of these designs were from Joe Pitt and



'I've also never seen fewer notes come from a director to a design department than I have on this film, and that speaks volumes to [designer] Tim Lamb and [art director] Christine Bian.'

- Producer Peter McCown



Tim Lamb creating those characters off of our direction," says Charmatz. "They're both brilliant, smart, thoughtful artists who are some of the best, and they did a lot of the heavy lifting in creating those characters. The animation leads on the movie just did incredible work. I loved it. They just brought the gold."

A Terrific Team

McCown claims that he's never seen a higher functioning and creatively adept crew as the design team for *Orion and the Dark*. He says, "I've also never seen fewer notes come from a director to a design department than I have on this film, and that speaks volumes to Tim Lamb and Christine Bian, our art director, as well. Sean would sometimes put up the guardrails and

bring them back to where he needed it. The proof is creating something from your gut and going with that, as opposed to seeing five different versions of it only to get back months later to what your gut tells you initially."

He adds, "Hans Dastrup, our head of character animation, has been doing this for 20-odd years at Blue Sky and DreamWorks, and he knew what to go for. There were constraints we had to work under, but he embraced those where he could and still elevated an entire studio's animation team and brought it to a level we otherwise wouldn't have got. Everyone went above and beyond to make something that looks like we made it for four times what we actually did."

For Charmatz, getting to make a film penned by Charlie Kaufman was only one of

the many gratifying elements about being attached to this special project.

"We made a movie that was pure and feels like it has a really strong message," he notes. "What an honor to make a movie that's like that. Having Flaming Lips music in this film is amazing, too. And working with Angela Bassett and Paul Walter Hauser, who I think is one of the most talented actors on this planet. Everyone was strong and resilient in the process and that was so rewarding to go through that collaboration with everyone and make something so great. Mikros Animation gave an extra effort and energy for every single shot that was animated." ♦

DreamWorks Animation's *Orion and the Dark* premieres on Netflix on Feb. 2.

Pouncing on a Thrilling Adventure

Director Raman Hui offers us an insider's look at the world of Paramount's *The Tiger's Apprentice*.

- By Devin Nealy -



Across countless cultures, mythology's millennia-long dalliance with astronomy and astrology has begotten some of humanity's most cherished stories. The Chinese zodiac, which oscillates through a 12-year cycle as opposed to its 12-month variant in the West, effortlessly retains its association with relevant myths, irrespective of the era.

Paramount+'s upcoming feature film *The Tiger's Apprentice* perfectly encapsulates this concept as an animated adaptation of the renowned 2003 novel by Laurence Yep. Besides possessing the narrative DNA of its source material, the new animated feature also has the privilege of emerging in an era where positive representation of Asian and Asian American culture is at an all-time high. Although Asian culture is at the film's forefront, director Raman Hui believes that *The Tiger's Apprentice's* strength lies in its universality.

"*The Tiger's Apprentice* speaks to any kids and families with any cultural background, not just [an] Asian background," says Hui. "While the Asian families can relate to the heritage in the story that they are familiar with, the non-

Asian families will get to see a different culture that they can appreciate and understand."

The new CG-animated feature follows the journey of Tom Lee (Brandon Soo Hoo), whose grandmother is grooming him to inherit her position as guardian of an ancient and powerful artifact known as the coral rose. Slain in an attack that threatens the safety of her grandson and the coral rose, Tom's grandmother cedes her role of guardian and mentor to her ally, Mr. Hu (Henry Golding). Armed with the ability to transform into an avatar of a tiger from the Chinese zodiac, Mr. Hu develops Tom's latent strengths to become the eponymous tiger's apprentice.

Earning Your Stripes

Although rife with fantastical elements, Hui felt a personal connection to *The Tiger's Apprentice* that grounded him throughout its production. "Being Chinese American and having lived in San Francisco for over 20 years, there is always a special place in my heart for San Francisco Chinatown," says Hui. "And I could picture all the specific elements in the story that happened there. The cultural back-

ground and the values of the characters inspired me and spoke to me."

Like studying at the feet of a martial arts master, the process of adapting *The Tiger's Apprentice* novel was lengthy and required several years of intense development. "The book by Laurence Yep was first published in 2003 and was in movie development soon after by Jane Startz," says Hui.

Mirroring its protagonist during its initial phase of development, *The Tiger's Apprentice* was originally in the hands of a different master, since the film was first optioned by and slated to debut on Cartoon Network. Eventually, that iteration of *The Tiger's Apprentice* failed to find its footing, leading to more than a decade of relative inactivity for the intellectual property. "I joined the project in 2019 when the script was ready for pre-production," says Hui. "During preproduction, we kept working on the script under the supervision of Bob Persichetti (*Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*) and Latifa Ouaou (*Minions: The Rise of Gru*).

"The production part, guided by Sandra Rabins, took around two-and-a-half years to finish," says Hui. "And the post-production,



'Being Chinese American and having lived in San Francisco for over 20 years, I could picture all the specific elements in the story that happened there. The cultural background and the values of the characters inspired me and spoke to me.'

- Director Raman Hui



ASTROLOGICAL ADVENTURE: A young boy in San Francisco meets a talking tiger named Mr. Hu (Henry Golding) and discovers he's the latest in a long line of guardians in *The Tiger's Apprentice*.



including the music by Steve Jablonsky (*DC League of Super-Pets*), finished in mid-2023. From pre-production to finishing [the film] altogether took about four years."

The process of realizing author Laurence Yep's dream of a cadre of warriors powered by the Chinese zodiac required the proverbial stars to align, as evidenced by the abundance of A-list voice talent within *The Tiger's Apprentice's* cast. "I had a blast working with the

amazing cast," says Hui. "They added beautiful layers and dimensions to the characters with humor and emotions."

As with any film, the chemistry shared between leads is an essential element for success, and according to Hui, the men behind the titular tiger and his apprentice provided the movie with a rich emotional core. "Henry Golding gave us the powerful yet sensitive, tough yet fun Hu the Tiger, and Brandon Soo Hoo

played the troublemaking but good-hearted apprentice Tom," says Hui.

Aside from boasting enough star power to make an astrology aficionado's knees wobble, *The Tiger's Apprentice* is a shining example of representation, as members of the AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) community comprise a majority of the cast. "Sandra Oh gave us a sympathetic, magical and spectacular Mistral the Dragon," says Hui. "And Michelle

**FAMILIAR VOICES:**

Directed by *Shrek* veteran Raman Hui, *The Tiger's Apprentice* features a stellar cast of actors, including Michelle Yeoh, Henry Golding, Lucy Liu, Sandra Oh, Leah Lewis and Bowen Yang.



Yeoh gave us the complicated, threatening and whimsical evil force Loo. You wouldn't want to disagree with Michelle."

The Eye of the Tiger

It's common for martial artists to attribute their victories to the power of positive visualization, and for the crew behind *The Tiger's Apprentice*, a clear vision of success was equally crucial in crafting a mystical world of kung fu practitioners. "Our production design team, led by Christophe Lautrette (*Rumble*), paid extra attention to details to make what is on screen authentic to the culture and background of the story," says Hui. "We worked great as a team, and I was happy to be the go-to person for any questions regarding the culture. For example, how would a Chinese grandmother show her grandson love without saying, 'I love you'? The answer is she may pinch his cheek

or feed him with a lot of food to express that affection."

Although visualization is a pivotal portion of the equation, the execution of one's intent is what produces results. Helping to shepherd *The Tiger's Apprentice* from the theoretical realm to tangibility was a team of expertly talented artists. "It took close to 80 animators to animate the movie," says Hui. "The majority of the animators animated in France. We also had animators from Spain, England, Belgium and Canada work on it remotely."

Wrangling such a massive stable of creators is an art in itself, and Hui is quick to credit his colleagues who helped compose the mosaic of talent behind *The Tiger's Apprentice*. "David Nasser and Yannick Honore supervised the animation across all these countries," says Hui. "I was grateful for how much they cared about the characters in the movie and how they

brought them to life with hilarious, energetic and touching acting. I also learned to speak a little French and a very little Thai, while I taught the animators some simple Chinese."

The Tiger's Apprentice possesses a spectacle and scale on par with the kung fu films of yesteryear and modern Marvel movies, but at its core it's a relatable coming-of-age story. Despite his irrepressible pride for the breathtaking work his team poured into the film on a visual and narrative level, Hui believes *The Tiger's Apprentice's* effervescent tone is what audiences will identify with and enjoy the most. "I hope the audience will have fun and feel uplifted watching how Hu the Tiger, and his friends help Tom grow to become a wonderful apprentice," says Hui. ♦

***The Tiger's Apprentice* premieres on Feb. 2 on Paramount+.**

DC
**MERRY LITTLE
BATMAN**

2 ANNIE AWARDS NOMINATIONS

BEST CHARACTER DESIGN - FEATURE
NIKOLAS ILIC

BEST VOICE ACTING - FEATURE
DAVID HORNSBY (CHARACTER: JOKER)



**THE LEGEND OF
VOX MACHINA**

ANNIE AWARDS NOMINEE

BEST EDITORIAL - TV/MEDIA
"THE SUNKEN TOMB"
TODD RALEIGH • JOELLE KRISTY



**INVINCIBLE
ATOM EVE**

ANNIE AWARDS NOMINEE
BEST SPECIAL PRODUCTION



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Loving the Defective Detective

Grimsburg's exec producer and showrunner Chadd Gindin talks about the inspirations and challenges of bringing the new FOX primetime show to animated life.

- By Ramin Zahed -



FOX's popular Sunday night animation lineup gets a welcome new addition this month, when the detective noir spoof *Grimsburg* settles into the regular 9:30 p.m. spot following *The Great North*. The clever series follows the misadventures of disheveled Detective Marvin Flute (voiced by exec producer Jon Hamm), who returns to his hometown where everyone is quite eccentric and is hiding a strange secret. In addition to Hamm, the show features the voices of Alan Tudyk, Kevin Michael Richardson, Rachel Dratch, Erinn Hayes and Greg Chun. Created by Catlan McClelland and Matthew Schlissel, *Grimsburg* is yet another new show produced by the team at Bento Box Entertainment. *Grimsburg's* showrunner and exec producer Chadd Gindin was kind enough to answer a few of our burning questions about the new toon:

First up, congrats on the great ratings (2.6 million viewers) for the sneak peek of *Grimsburg* on FOX in January! Can you tell us a bit about how you got involved with the project?

Thank you so much. You know, I've been working on this show for about three-and-a-half years now, and it all started when I got an email asking me to take a look at a very funny live-action script by Matt [Schlissel] and Cat [McClelland], which was a spoof of the Nordic noir dramas. FOX loved it, but they wanted to turn it into an animated show, so they wanted someone with animation experience to make it work.

So, we broadened it out and it became about this defective detective, Marvin Flute, who was sort of a mess, and is coming back to his hometown and trying to figure out his family. Then from there, we added as much as we could to make it worth being animated, like a cyborg partner or an imaginary friend who is [a] skeleton, or a chief who is part Sas-

quatch. Soon, we realized that the town became a character, too, and we had to figure out how far we wanted to go with the curse that was put on it, why there were so many deaths in this town and why would we have a death every week. That was sort of the seed of everything, which was basically answering the question: How do we make *Twin Peaks* meet *Springfield*?

What are some of the qualities of this show that make it special to you?

I love the world that it's set in, and I love the *Airplane!*-like writing, the way we are spoofing the genre. But at the same time, it has this main character and his relationship with his ex-wife and kid, things that we can really dig deep into. To me, it felt like it wasn't going to be your typical Sunday night animation show about a family — which is great, but this was a little bit different; and you wouldn't have to trod in these very deep footsteps that have already



LOOKING FOR CLUES:

Marvin Flute (voiced by Jon Hamm) returns to his cursed hometown to solve weird murders, while trying to be a better family man in FOX's new adult animated series *Grimsburg*.



Chadd Gindin



hasn't been so worn out. I loved the idea of also working with FOX and animation, something that I'd been watching since I was so young, and [to] get a chance to run a show on Animation Domination and help develop a show that one day would be on a billboard with Homer and Bob and Peter was very exciting.

Let's talk about the show's visual and overall design a little bit.

Even though I worked as a writer on *The Cleveland Show* before, my responsibilities were somewhat limited; you're just there to write jokes. But when you're running a big show like this one, there's a whole different can of worms that opens up. We had to decide from the beginning how everything was going to look. You can even see from the pictures online how much the designs changed. Early on we had this handsome detective in a cool suit who was running around some of these cool crimes, but he's a mess. He was just too good looking to be funny. I remember we'd

been set out in front of you, so that we could maybe go in a slightly different path that

go back and forth with the designers, and I was pushing this idea of his belly being bigger. We had this idea that here was a guy who was good looking at one time, but now things are falling apart. One of the designers made the great choice to do like a little triangle-shaped split in his shirt where you can see his belly, and that was just a great detail. We shortened his tie up so it would lay on top of his belly, and his hair is receding now, and we gave him long legs. We made his jacket bigger and bigger because he likes to be comfortable.

For Harmony, she has these slash marks over her eyes from being raised by bears. It made me realize that character design is so important in telling the backstory of each of the characters. When you see Summers it's pretty obvious that he's a robot, but he's got a big smile, so it seems that he's OK with it. One detail I love about Stan is that we put a towel on him, and the designer put a little tag on it that every towel has. It's those tiny details that make everything work.



One of the toughest challenges for every new show producer is the ridiculously large number of animated shows that are out there already. What is your take on that?

Oh absolutely. There are so many more shows now than we had compared to 10, 15 years ago when I was working on *The Cleveland Show*. As the audience, I think we're spoiled, because if you don't like a show, you can immediately find something else. Your particular sense of humor is represented somewhere in the many animated series that are currently available. I think there's no way you could replicate the success of a show like *The Simpsons* these days. We all watched it, and it was

SMALL TOWN CHARACTERS:

With animation produced by Bento Box Ent., *Grimsburg* features the voices of Jon Hamm, Alan Tudyk, Kevin Michael Richardson, Rachel Dratch, Erinn Hayes and Greg Chun.



so new and amazing. We all fell in love with it. My 10-year-old kid loves it and knows every episode. So, all I can do is make something that makes *me* laugh. I'd love to say that I'm the perfect artist who only makes what makes him happy, and I don't care what anyone says. But I *do care* what everyone says – but I really did my best to focus on what makes me laugh. It's the speed that I like comedy [to be] and the type of humor I like, and the right ratio of heart to humor that I like. You can make a show according to the ratio that you like. It makes it both difficult and freeing at the same time.

To what degree was Jon Hamm involved as an exec producer? Did you write the show with him in mind as the voice of your detective?

We had the script done and we had to decide who to get to voice Marvin, and someone said Jon Hamm would be great. Once his name came up, we said, "Yes, that's great. Can we get him?" Luckily one of our producers, Gail Berman, is good friends with Jon's manager, and very quickly Jon was sent the script, and we got the word that he was interested and he wanted to sit down with us. So, we went into panic mode. I remember staying up, thinking of all the questions he might ask and how to answer them correctly to make him feel comfortable. We got to the Zoom meeting, and he

says, "Quick, before we start, I want to tell you that I am doing this. I probably shouldn't tell you right away, but I love it and I want to do it!" So, I said, "That's great. I have nothing to discuss. Bye!"

Right from the start, he was not only on board but he'd also help out by pitching things. Then we started to design, thinking about his voice. We started to think about what would happen to Jon if he let himself go. Then once he was involved, it was also easier to get other talent. Once the show started and started recording, he [was] so funny and [had] great stuff to offer, and he nails it every time. He has such a huge load to carry on his shoulders in every episode. Hopefully, in Season 10, we can tell other stories where the biggest load isn't on him."

You mentioned the movies *Airplane!* and *The Naked Gun* as a couple of key inspirations. Let's talk about

some of your other big animation and overall artistic influences?

Oh yes, definitely those two movies and *The Three Amigos* were movies that left a huge impression on me. I started doing stand-up shows at open-mic nights when I was only 12





Jon Hamm's on the Case

The acclaimed actor discusses the joys of working on *Grimsburg* and his love for animation.

years old. So, I used to listen to stand-up comedy albums all the time. I did that until I was 18, and then I got into NYU and studied acting and writing there. Then, all through college, my friends and I were all about *The Simpsons*. It's all we talked about, and we referenced all the lines back and forth to each other and did our impersonations of the characters. Then, of course, there was *SNL* and David Letterman and Steve Martin. Who doesn't like them?

OK, before I let you go, tell me what you hope audiences will take away from *Grimsburg*?

I hope they take away that this show is its own thing: It's a story about this guy who's a little bit messed up. He has to deal with his family issues, but he also has this workplace that he's dealing with, and he's living in this crazy town that's got murders happening. We are trying to do something sort of different here, and if there is a mystery that's being solved, sometimes it's in the foreground and sometimes it's in the background. We're just trying to do something a little bit different. We feel like we're really getting the hang of it as we got into our second episode — each season is only 13 episodes, so two seasons today is kind of like one season some years ago! I just hope people enjoy the ride. ♦

Grimsburg premieres on FOX on Sunday, Feb.



Jon Hamm may be best known as a serious Emmy-winning actor who played troubled ad exec Don Draper in *Mad Man* and recently delivered top performances in the new seasons of *Fargo* and *The Morning Show*. However, the talented actor has also lent his famous voice to close to 20 animated shows and movies over the years, including *The Simpsons*, *Robot Chicken*, *Bob's Burgers*, *Archer*, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Family Guy*, *Metalocalypse*, *M.O.D.O.K.*, *Big Mouth*, *Invincible*, *Big City Greens* and *Minions*.

Hamm, who exec produces FOX's new Sunday night show *Grimsburg* and also voices its main character, Marvin Flute, says he knew he wanted to be part of the new prime-time show when he first read the script. "It wasn't quite like anything I had seen be-



fore," he tells *Animation Magazine* in a recent phone interview. "From a tonal standpoint, it was a bit different from everything else, and I thought it offered plenty of fertile ground to plow from a comedic standpoint. Mostly, I thought the show was something that I would watch myself and it seemed like a fun thing to do!"

The 52-year-old actor says he has always been a big fan of animation, mentioning a wide range of favorites, from Chuck Jones classics, Terrytoons' Heckle and Jeckle, Tex Avery's Droopy and Bill Plympton movies. "I also love all the great Miyazaki movies, and Spike and Mike's animation festivals. Those were always my jam," he mentions. "There's just there's so much amazing animated stuff out there in. All of it is super interesting and worthwhile. I mean if you're a fan, all it all triggers an amazing response in your psyche."

When asked about the look of his character on *Grimsburg*, which according to exec producer Chadd Gindin is loosely based on "what would Jon Hamm look like if he let himself go," Hamm laughs. "I love the look of the show," he says. "Obviously, everything, including the look of my character, is heightened for fun. Marvin definitely has a lot going on in his life, and the show offers a real comic take on the detective genre as well."

Hamm, who is also voicing Sentinel Prime in the upcoming *Transformers One* movie, says he has already started working on the second season of the show, although there's still work to be done on the first one. "With animation, there are always quite a bit of pickups and edits. It's not a quick process, and you're constantly tweaking jokes and, hopefully, you're making things funnier and sillier. I just love doing that stuff. I hope audiences will be also enjoy visiting this world on Sunday nights and find it entertaining and worthwhile, because just like *Krapopolis*, it has a different vibe from the other adult animated shows on the lineup." ♦

Surgeons in Space

The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy delivers great humor and feeling out of aliens in need of medical attention — stat!

- By Karen Idelson -



Fans of genre-bending adult animated comedy, this is your lucky month. *The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy*, an eagerly anticipated new show that blends sci-fi, adult humor and hospital drama, will premiere exclusively on Prime Video this February in more than 240 countries.

The show follows the lives of two besties — Dr. Sleech and Dr. Klak, aliens and intergalactically renowned surgeons — as they try to combat everything from deep-space STIs to anxiety-eating parasites. Created by Emmy winner Cirocco Dunlap (*Russian Doll*, *Baymax!*, *Waffles + Mochi*) and Animal Pictures (run by Maya Rudolph, Danielle Renfrew Behrens and Natasha Lyonne), the series' first eight-episode was produced by Titmouse, Copa Studio and Mighty Animation.

Although the series is set in outer space with a cast of strange galactic creatures, Dunlap says she knew she wanted to keep the dra-

ma real and grounded so the audience could feel invested in the characters, tentacles and all. Ideally, viewers will recognize their problems as similar to ours.

Going for Earthling Emotions

"We couldn't make this show with sexy aliens," says a laughing Dunlap, who is also showrunner and executive producer on the series. "We wanted a sense of 'grounded-ness,' so we opted to find a style for the animation that felt more real. The writing is really emotionally honest, and the main characters are trying to live their lives and work out their problems as they talk to each other. So, they're not human and they're aliens, but we wanted them to have nuanced expressions, so this way they feel Earthy."

She adds, "I think our animators, our studios did this really well. They worked so hard on it, and it helps when things on the show get ridiculous. When you have tentacles everywhere,

it helps if you have this sense of real drama so it doesn't feel like you're lost somewhere. It feels like there's something anchoring you to real emotions and story. And if you've got this thing anchoring you, then you can also go to ridiculous heights in the animation."

Dunlap's inspirations for the series range from such sci-fi classics as *Star Trek* and *Alien* to beloved hospital dramas like *Grey's Anatomy*. She believes she was able to blend the two genres through animation — given all the wild images in the show's vision of outer space — in a way that probably wouldn't have worked in live action.

"Our two main characters are having the conversations we all have with a good friend that we might work with," says Dunlap. "They're talking about their hopes and fears and trying to get through their lives, but at the same time they're these aliens who are doctors who have to find a way to deal with the latest thing that comes in the hospital. So, we want it to have that kind of quality."

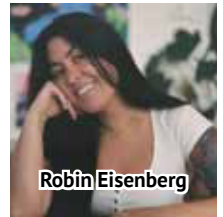


'You see the characters with their real emotions in this strange world, and it's still this funny sci-fi show that we hope people will see and find relatable.'

— Creator Cirocco Dunlap



HEALING THE ALIENS: Created by Cirocco Dunlap, *The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy* follows two alien surgeons who tackle anxiety-eating parasites, illegal time loops and other wild intergalactic diseases and challenges.



Robin Eisenberg

Co-producer and production designer Robin Eisenberg brought in unusual source ideas for her character designs. She found her inspirations for the alien looks in the strangest Earth beings.

"I think [the look of the show's characters] was definitely inspired by a lot of actual creatures that we would find in the deep sea," says Eisenberg. "We would just look at nature images and then sort of combine them. I've done alien-looking creatures in the past and they're sort of humanoid aliens, and I've done more animal type of aliens for some music videos and other projects."

She says they tried to push the alien qualities of all the characters. "We would look at deep-sea fish and then add something like bioluminescent lights on the head and all the other details you see in the characters," says the designer. "Then we would give it [to] other people on the team, so it was definitely just so much fun to see what everybody came up with. We were also looking for a color palette that would have this sense of fun but wasn't too soft [or] delicate, so you see these purples and fun colors because we want it to reflect the comedy in the series, too."

Dunlap and Eisenberg were also set on a look that was engaging — but not pretty — in a galaxy that was distressed and worn. They didn't want a shiny chrome background for the characters. "This is a place where aliens live and work, so it has to feel real even if it's

in space," says Dunlap.

Eisenberg agrees. "It was a big part of the production design that we paid a lot of attention to the details of everything," she notes. "So, in each vending machine we have tiny little bits of tape on things so that you know it's been repaired. We felt like the more attention to detail we can get in the show, the more the world is going to feel lived in, so we wanted to really find these little details and, like, scuff marks on things. We were really excited about medical posters that you see in the show."

Along with the distinct, playful visuals, the series has a dream voice cast. Keke Palmer stars as Dr. Klak, Oscar nominee Stephanie Hsu (*Everything Everywhere All at Once*) voices Dr. Sleaf, Maya Rudolph is Dr. Vlam, Sam Smith plays Dr. Azel, Natasha Lyonne is Nurse Tup and Golden Globe winner Kieran Culkin is the voice of Dr. Plowp.

"Yeah, they're perfect," says Dunlap. "I can't get over the main cast, but then you've got the guest cast, and they were just incredible, too. We've got Tracee Ellis Ross, and John Waters comes in for an episode. I just feel blown away. I think a lot of actors are really open to doing voice work. It's been amazing to work with all of them."

The show is scored by Wendy & Lisa, who rose to fame as key collaborators with Prince. This isn't their first time working on a TV series; The pair received an Emmy for Outstanding Original Main Title Theme Music for their work on *Nurse*

Jackie. This time around, though, they were asked to develop the kind of music that would work for both a sci-fi series and a hospital drama.

"We were so lucky to be able to work with them," says Dunlap. "Everything they did brought out new things in our stories, and their music was exactly what we needed and fit so well with the show."

Loving the Aliens

Dunlap looks back on the work that was done for the first season and feels they were able to put together an incredibly strong team to create the show. She also hopes viewers will see themselves and their own lives in her alien lead characters.

"It's kind of cool that the show ends up being about anxiety," says Dunlap. "There are so many people living with anxiety, and our show gets really heavily into living with a severe sort of anxiety or clinical anxiety and the desperation many people have to try to fix that, which is never really possible. You realize you can only really manage it. But you see the characters with their real emotions in this strange world, and it's still this funny sci-fi show that we hope people will see and find relatable." ♦

***The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy* premieres Feb. 23 on Prime Video. A second season is already in the works.**

Three Times the Fun

Kyle Stegina and Josh Lehrman introduce us to their hilarious new Nickelodeon show, *Rock Paper Scissors*.



Kyle Stegina (left) and Josh Lehrman (right)

Three familiar inanimate objects get fresh, animated lives in *Rock Paper Scissors* – the new Nickelodeon series created by *Robot Chicken* alums Kyle Stegina and Josh Lehrman. The show, which has already gained traction on YouTube and has been nominated for an Annie Award for Best Writing TV/Media for its pre-released episode, “Birthday Police,” makes its official TV debut this month.

The series, which is the first to be picked up from the cable channel’s Intergalactic Shorts Program, follows big-hearted Rock, affectatious intellectual Paper and overly confident Scissors – voiced respectively by Ron Funches (*Trolls*, *Trolls Band Together*), Thomas Lennon (*Zoey 102*, *17 Again*, *RENO 911!*) and Carlos Alazraqui (*Rocko’s Modern Life*, *RENO 911!*) – a trio of best friends and roommates who lovingly compete over everything in hilarious but mostly wildly absurd ways.

Shower Time Inspiration

“Most of our projects come from long brainstorming sessions where Kyle and I ask each other, ‘What are we going through in our lives?’ or ‘What themes do we want to explore?’ This idea came to me in the shower,” recalls Lehrman.

Stegina says, “Josh came to my apartment

and said, ‘How about a show starring Rock, Paper and Scissors? They’re roommates and they’re competitive over everything.’ It just made me laugh. It’s such a simple and fun premise that anyone can get on board with, and truthfully, the ideas you can pitch in one breath and visualize immediately are often the best ideas.”

“Or the dumbest ideas,” deadpans Lehrman. “And this show is a mix of both – in the best way!” adds Stegina with a smile.

“Our show uses semi-photorealistic backgrounds with 2D cartoony characters, and it’s such an inviting contrast that’s just fun to watch,” says Stegina. “We were very ambitious in [the] series with how many places our characters go, and the background designers worked tirelessly to deliver on everything.”

According to Lehrman, most of the credit for the visual style goes to Amanda Li and Paul Watling. “They worked on the pilot presentation with us,” he notes. “Then two more amazing artists, Bob Boyle and John Won, came on and perfected the style when we started the series. I won’t give away any episodes, but there are several where Kyle and I saw the backgrounds in a design meeting, and they were so beautiful we were like, ‘What is this doing in our show? This belongs in a museum!’”

The duo is equally thrilled with their show’s stellar voice cast.

“Oh, man. We got so lucky with the cast,” says Lehrman. “We essentially got our first choice for everybody. I remember, in the early stages of development, Nickelodeon asked us who we wanted for the trio. And in the car ride back to one of our places, we pitched Ron Funches for Rock and Thomas Lennon for Paper. Scissors took us a little more time to figure out because we needed to find someone who could be a jerk *and* be vulnerable, but then we thought of Carlos Alazraqui because we worked with him on an episode of a Comedy Central show we wrote, and he really elevated the role. Also, he was Rocko, and Kyle and I were both big fans of *Rocko’s Modern Life* when we were kids. And all three of them said yes.”

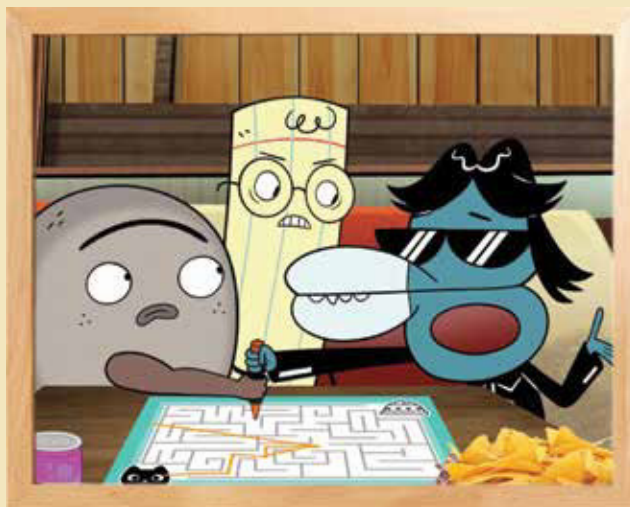
“Melissa Villaseñor is wonderful as Pencil, and there was no one other than Eddie Pepitone for Lou,” says Stegina. “We wrote the part for him. We didn’t tell him that, though, because we didn’t want it to come out wrong! Like, ‘Hey Eddie. We wrote this miserable, talking garbage can with only you in mind.’”

For Lehrman, one of the most challenging aspects of the job is to tell fresh stories nobody has told before. “I’ve never seen an episode about getting busted by the Birthday Police for



'Dealing with giant fighting robots, hordes of ghosts, anti-fart machines and time travel are just normal days for Rock, Paper and Scissors, which makes it a fun sandbox to tell any story you can come up with.'

— Co-creator/exec producer Kyle Stegina



FRIENDLY TRIO:

Kyle Stegina and Josh Lehrman's new show follows the wacky adventures of three competitive best friends, voiced by Ron Funches, Thomas Lennon and Carlos Alazraqui.



lying about your birthday at a restaurant to get free cake," he explains. "Also, when we do tackle something that's been done before, we try to tell the story in a way no one's told it before."

"I think the toughest part was creating a world that you want to keep coming back to," Stegina chimes in. "Dealing with giant fighting robots, hordes of ghosts, anti-fart machines and time travel are just normal days for Rock, Paper and Scissors, which makes it a fun sandbox to tell any story you can come up with."

Lehrman believes that one of the qualities that makes the show stand out is the unpredictability of its storytelling. "This show isn't bound by many rules, we can really go anywhere and do anything," he explains. "We have an episode that takes place over the course of 50 years and another episode that takes place entirely in Scissors' head!"

Stegina adds, "I really love their unique friendship: We think that balance is a pretty realistic

portrayal of friendship that you don't see a lot of in kids' TV. I'll add, too, that I love when we take a really silly idea and build it to a surprisingly emotional moment at the end. We do it sparingly, and I won't give away any episodes, but I think viewers will be moved by some episodes this season."

When asked about their animation idols and influences, Lehrman mentions *Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *The LEGO Movie*. "I'd also like to say a public thank you to Will Carsola and Dave Stewart, who created the Adult Swim show *Mr. Pickles*," he notes. "Kyle and I worked on that show's spin-off, which was the only 11-minute show we'd written for. Will and Dave really care about storytelling, and I'm sure a lot of our structural instincts come from those guys."

Stegina points to *Futurama* as a pivotal source of inspiration. "I think there's a moment for every kid when they realize what their actual sense of humor is, and I remember first seeing

that show and thinking, 'Oh, *that's* what comedy is!' It's a wonderful blend of super smart and super dumb with heart – and it's been a huge inspiration in almost everything I've written."

"I hope the viewers love these characters as much as Kyle and I do," concludes Lehrman. "It's a ridiculous thing to say, but these talking objects feel very real to me, and I'm rooting for all of them. Also, I hope viewers learn that you shouldn't lie about your birthday to get free cake because the Birthday Police are real and dangerous!" ♦

Produced by Nickelodeon Animation, *Rock Paper Scissors* is created, written and executive produced by Stegina and Lehrman. Conrad Vernon (*Sausage Party*) and Bob Boyle (*The Fairly OddParents*) also serve as executive producers. The show debuts on Nickelodeon on Feb. 12 at 5:30 p.m. ET/PT. New episodes will continue to air weekdays at 5:30 p.m.

A New Problem-Solver Is Born

The creators of the new animated series *Lyla in the Loop* give us the scoop on their charming PBS Kids toon.



Young PBS viewers will get to meet a clever and resourceful seven-year-old heroine this month in a new 2D-animated show called *Lyla in the Loop*. Produced by Mighty Picnic and Pipeline Studios, the show targets four- to eight-year olds and follows the adventures of Lyla, who lives in a big city with her close-knit family, fantastical blue sidekick Stu and a host of relatable and quirky characters in her community. Created to teach creative and strategic problem-solving and critical thinking, the show will be presented in both English and Spanish on PBS Kids.

Series creator and showrunner Dave Peth says he was inspired by a question posed by the PBS Kids team at a conference. "They asked, 'What might a show be like that is about learning to code, but that is not about watching someone type at a computer?'" he recalls. "This got me thinking not just about coding specifically but about the creativity and problem-solving skills that are the foun-

dation of careers across STEAM fields (science, technology, engineering, art and math), of which animation production is a part."

He points out that these careers require such skills as identifying and breaking down complex problems into parts, thinking flexibly through potential solutions, working together with others to try them out, and then trying again and again when things don't work. "We all do this every day in small and big ways without even realizing it," Peth says. "And that's what *Lyla in the Loop* is all about: a family who puts those skills to use in everyday life."

The first conversations with the PBS Kids team began back in late 2015. "PBS Kids is great to work with because they put the effort in upfront to grow and develop an idea with creators, so that by the time we get to production, the underlying concept has been thoroughly tested and sharpened," says Peth. "In 2018, we started work on a pilot, and then in 2022, we began production on the series with our animation partner, Pipeline Studios. Pipe-

line has truly taken the series to the next level with their talent and collaborative spirit. I'm blown away by their work on our show."

Clean, Flat and Character-Driven

Peth says that the 2D show is animated in Harmony in a flat, graphic style that fits the spirit of the show, with a color palette that's warm and inviting like the Loops family itself. "Our stories are character-driven, centering on the dynamics between Lyla and her family and also the fantastical antics of her sidekick, Stu. That clean, flat design put the focus on the *action* and the characters' emotional *reactions*. Plus, it makes Stu look really cute."

Exec producer and head writer Fracaswell Hyman, who has worked on a variety of shows, including *Gullah Gullah Island*, *Peg + Cat*, *Blue's Clues* and *101 Dalmatians: The Series*, says he loves the fact that the show is beautiful, colorful and welcoming to look at. "The world is visually inviting, warm, realistic and magical at the same time," he notes. "I also love the



'Lyla has an African American father and a Jamaican mother. Black culture is not a monolith, we don't all come from the same cultures and it's rare that I have seen a show for children that acknowledges this.'

— Exec producer and showrunner Fracaswell Hyman

fact that the Loops family have been designed to look recognizably Black, from their hair to their noses to their body types. The family feels like a real family. They're not always saccharine sweet, but they all love each other, even when a little sarcasm or attitude slips in. This is one of the aspects that makes them a real family to me, and I believe our viewers, kids and adults, will recognize themselves and the people they love."

"Lyla has an African American father and a Jamaican mother," he says. "Black culture is not a monolith, we don't all come from the same cultures and it's rare that I have seen a show for children that acknowledges this. We come from many different cultures and celebrate our differences while molding our children to emulate the best of what our different cultures bring to the table. I am proud to have been a part of bringing this family to the screen."

Hyman says working as a head writer and launching a new show at the tail end of the pandemic had its share of challenges. "We didn't have a writers' room where we could meet day after day, get to know each other, laugh and joke with each other, share stories of triumph, pain and humor," he recalls. "Instead, we met on Zoom a few times as a group, but mostly one-on-one. We had to work harder to build the kind of connective tissue that would make the voices of the characters consistent and true. Many, many times we would

get fine scripts from our writers and then have to take the stories 'in house' to make sure the voices, the tone of the show and the feeling we wanted to portray remained true to our goals and vision."

Hyman points out that there are a lot more animated shows than live-action ones today. "I do believe there is a value in children seeing real children on the screen," he says. "On the other hand, in the days of *Gullah Gullah Island*, there were fewer writers of color that had been trained to write for children. Today, thankfully, we have development programs and writers' fellowships specifically designed to encourage a diverse spectrum of young people to create and write for our most precious asset, the children."

"I think the industry is finally coming around to believe that diversity and representation behind the scenes is just as important as diversity and representation on the screen," Hyman adds. "Yes, *Lyla in the Loop*, a show cen-

tered on a Black family, was created by Dave Peth, a white man. In days gone by, that would not have mattered when it came to who was involved behind the scenes. Today it does! But it's not enough to add one or two Black voices. To achieve diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, Dave and the folks at PBS Kids encouraged us to include people of different ethnicities and backgrounds, gender, abilities, ages and experience. We made room at the table for a true DEIA experience ... As artists and creatives, it is our job to stand against what sets out to divide us and use our talents, our strengths and our voices to inspire unity, empathy and compassion in our children."

Both Peth and Hyman are hoping that *Lyla in the Loop* will become a staple for family viewing and that it will bring joy to children and their families. "I hope they will have so much fun watching Lyla and Stu on their adventures that the computational-thinking curriculum connected with the show will seep through and become a part of the tools they need to find successful paths in life," concludes Hyman. ♦

***Lyla in the Loop* premieres on PBS Kids on Feb. 5.**



SMART SOLUTIONS: Created by Dave Peth, *Lyla in the Loop* centers on a clever seven-year-old girl who lives in a big city with her close-knit family and her blue sidekick, Stu.

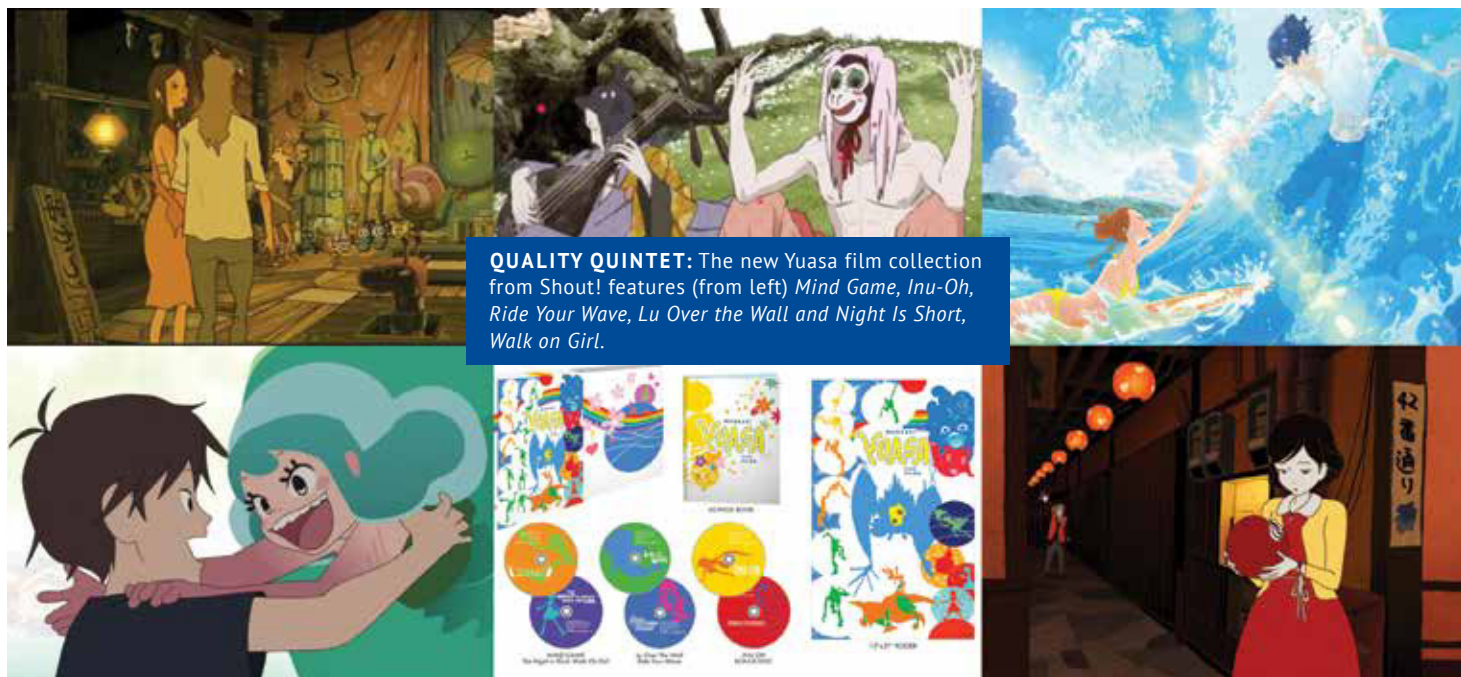


Dave Peth

Five Gateways to an Extraordinary Mind

The new Masaaki Yuasa Blu-ray collection from Shout! Studios offers a glorious dive into the world of the brilliant Japanese auteur.

- By Charles Solomon -



QUALITY QUINTET: The new Yuasa film collection from Shout! features (from left) *Mind Game*, *Inu-Oh*, *Ride Your Wave*, *Lu Over the Wall* and *Night Is Short, Walk on Girl*.

Among the talented directors who have emerged in Japan in recent years, Masaaki Yuasa is the most mercurial and difficult to categorize, as this lavish six-disc set demonstrates. Yuasa marches to the beat of a different drummer (or rhythm section), mixing genres, styles and media with a seemingly effortless facility. His films have little in common with most anime features and even less with American studio animation.

In an interview conducted via email in 2017, he said, “*Spirited Away* is a favorite work of mine; if it is not a direct influence, there are many similar scenes in [Hayao] Miyazaki’s older works. For example, *Future Boy Conan*. I watched that series as a child, and I think its animation greatly affected me. I’m influenced by many directors whose work I love including Tsutomu Shibayama, Hayao Miyazaki, Ken Izaki, Steven Spielberg, Yasujiro Ozu, Brian De Palma, Akira Kurosawa, Alfred Hitchcock and Tex Avery. *Yellow Submarine* is a favorite film that I think has had a strong influence on my own work.”

The influence of *Yellow Submarine* can be clearly seen in Yuasa’s first feature, *Mind Game* (2004), adapted from a manga by Robin Nishi. What begins as a love triangle involving a manga artist named Nishi, his childhood sweetheart and her fiancé spirals into an out-of-control fantasy-adventure replete with yakuza thugs, an eccentric old man and episodes that take place inside a whale. The story takes a back seat to the constantly shifting visual styles that range from Flash-animated dance steps to processed live-action stills, and a palette that changes unpredictably from subdued to Day-Glo. *Mind Game* will remind some viewers of the “head trip” films of the ’70s.

Yuasa directed two acclaimed films in 2017 (an astonishing feat for any animation helmer): *Lu Over the Wall* won the Cristal for Best Feature at Annecy; *Night Is Short, Walk on Girl* won the Japan Academy Prize for Animation of the Year.

Lu Over the Wall mixes elements of Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid*, Miyazaki’s *Ponyo* and alienated teen sagas into a quirky, highly personal film. In a flyspeck coastal

village, three teenage musicians rehearse and attract Lu, an exuberant young mermaid. Whenever she hears music, Lu’s tail splits into legs and feet, enabling her to dance. And when she dances, every person within ear-shot joins in – whether they want to or not. As the film is animated in Flash, the dances may look upbeat and funny, but the characters’ feet and bodies flail about cartoonishly, with no sense of weight or believable motion. Their friendship with Lu leads the teen trio to challenge the villagers’ prejudice against mer-people and eagerness for unrestrained real estate development.

Based on a novel by bestselling author Tomihiko Morimi (who also wrote *Penguin Highway* and *The Tatami Galaxy*), *Night Is Short, Walk on Girl* offers a complex, offbeat narrative. A group



Masaaki Yuasa

continued on page 39

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OF THE YEAR"**

KYLE LOGAN, *SCREEN ANARCHY*

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6 ANNIE AWARD
NOMINATIONS
INCLUDING
BEST FEATURE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA
TURTLES
MUTANT
MAYHEM



It's Time for Toon Town's Biggest Night!

The 51st edition of the Annie Awards promises to be another entertaining celebration of achievements in animation.



With several months of award-season hype and daily prognostication from experts, the actual arrival of the Annie Awards evening comes as a welcome event. Conceived by the late, great actress June Foray, the Annies have been a part of animation life in Los Angeles since the first edition took place at the banquet room of the Sportsmen's Lodge (which has now been converted to a shopping center) in Studio City.

This year, the 51st edition of the Annies will take place on Saturday, Feb. 17 at UCLA's Royce Hall and will honor the best of the industry in 37 categories. As always, the event promises to be a festive, entertaining and celebratory affair.

ASIFA-Hollywood president Sue Shakespeare says she's looking forward to celebrating the best of the animation world at the popular event. "It is so exciting to look back on this year and see how animation has flourished at the box office," she notes. "Finally, we are back in the theaters, experiencing the amazing films on the big screen! It's so impactful! The state of the animation industry has never been better. More films are being produced each year, and the variety of subjects being explored is fabulous."

Global Champions

Shakespeare adds, "We're seeing the 'value' of animation in film. Animated films are among the highest earners at the box office. Of course, this is not surprising to many of us, for we recognize that animation can tell stories and create memorable movie experiences that communicate across boundaries and barriers of all kinds. When I look at the cross section of domestic and international, studio-backed and independent films released in 2023, I marvel at the amazing sophistication in them. So many styles are now being produced, and there is a greater prevalence of hybrid styles this year than ever before."

Shakespeare is also optimistic about the future of the industry. "Technology keeps moving forward, and I see more applications of technology forthcoming," she says. "I expect the importance of animation to continue growing in the years to come. I'm also excited that animation has proven yet again its resilience. While much of the industry was impacted due to the strikes, animated projects in film and television were able to continue moving forward and keeping people employed if their scripts and voice recordings had been finalized. Much like how we were able to adapt and set up remote working processes during COVID, we were able to continue working through these

challenging times. I'm excited to be a part of this amazing industry."

Frank Gladstone, the executive director of ASIFA-Hollywood and the executive producer of the Annie Awards, tells us that he has bought a new tuxedo jacket and is ready for the show. This year, the awards ceremony is a particularly special one for Gladstone: The much-respected animation veteran will be stepping down from his job at ASIFA in March after spending 12 years at the helm, but he says he will continue to be active as an ASIFA board member.

When asked about how it feels to be retiring from the job after so many years, he says, "I don't know yet! I am still the exec producer for this year and haven't had any time to think about anything else. I suppose that any sort of change always has its bittersweet moments, but I have had a great run. Also, the ASIFA executive committee has asked me to stay on as a board member, so I'll still have a chance to put in my two cents now and then!"

Looking back at his tenure with the animation organization, Gladstone says he is quite happy with what ASIFA has achieved over the year. "We worked diligently to stabilize and then grow AS-



Sue Shakespeare



'Because we champion everyone in the animation community, in some ways we are the proverbial melting pot. All are welcome, treated equitably, listened to, celebrated.'

- ASIFA-Hollywood exec director Frank Gladstone



IFA-Hollywood and that, at least most of the time, was fun. I am also convinced that it's the right time for other folks to take things even further."

Making an Impact

Gladstone adds, "The first two or three years were all about just trying to save the organization. At some point, maybe during the third year, I was looking around the table during a board meeting, and it dawned on me that whatever we were doing was working. We were actually growing again. That was a very gratifying moment."

Regarding the importance of ASIFA as a vital organization, Gladstone says, "Because we



Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio* won the top prize at last year's Annies.

champion everyone in the animation community, in some ways we are the proverbial melting pot. All are welcome, treated equitably, listened to, celebrated. That is our mission and our primary agenda. I think that every community needs a space like ours, maybe now more than ever."

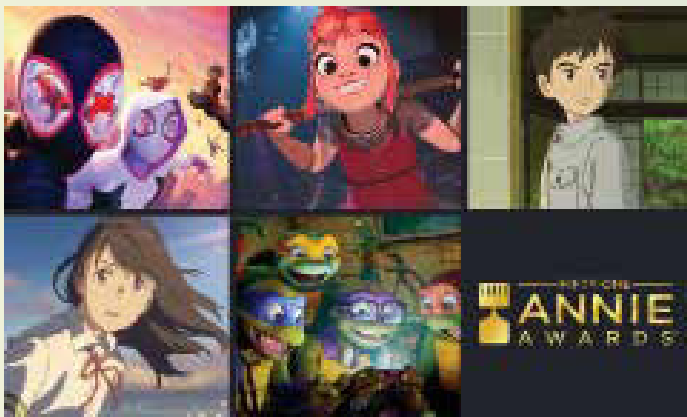
And what is his take on the state of animation? Gladstone responds, "This is one of the

most consistent questions I've been asked over more than 50 years in the business ... and, being in the business so long and seeing what I have been able to see, it's a question I never know how to answer. It's like what Chicagoans say about their city's weather, 'Don't like it? Wait five minutes and it'll change!'"

He also has some profound advice for whomever succeeds him as the executive director. "Make sure to eat healthy, exercise and get enough sleep!" he says with a smile. ♦

The Annie Awards take place on Saturday, Feb. 17, at UCLA's Royce Hall. To purchase tickets and learn more, visit annieawards.org.

The Annies: Major Categories at a Glance



Best Studio Feature

Nimona (Annapurna Animation for Netflix)
Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse (Sony Pictures Animation)
Suzume (CoMix Wave Films, STORY Inc.)
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem (Paramount, Nickelodeon)
The Boy and the Heron (Studio Ghibli, GKIDS)



Best Indie Feature

Ernest & Celestine: A Trip to Gibberitia (Folivari, Mélusine, Studio Canal, GKIDS)
Four Souls of Coyote (Cinemon Ent.)
Robot Dreams (Arcadia Motion Pictures)
The Inventor (Curiosity Studios)
White Plastic Sky (SALTO Films, Artichoke)

Best Special Production

Invincible: Atom Eve (Amazon MGM Studios, Skybound)
Shape Island: The Winter Blues (Bix Pix Ent., Apple)
Snoopy Presents: One-of-a-Kind Marcie (WildBrain Studios, Apple)
The Smeds and The Smoos (Magic Light Pictures)
The Velveteen Rabbit (Magic Light Pictures, Apple)

Best Short Subject

Carne de Dios (Ojo Raro, Fedora Productions)
Daffy in Wackyland (Warner Bros. Animation)
Humo (Outik Animation, 3rd Street Video, Mindsoup Ent., IMCINE)
Pina (Punchline Cinema, Next Days Films)
War Is Over! Inspired by the Music of John & Yoko (ElectroLeague)

Best Sponsored

"Video Games" by Tenacious D (Pinreel Inc.)
 Alzheimer's Research UK "Change The Ending" (Passion Pictures)
 "Laugh Track" by The National (featuring Phoebe Bridgers) (Bernard Derriman)
 WWF "Up in Smoke" (NOMINT)



Best TV/Media, Preschool

Batwheels "To the Batmobile!" (Warner Bros. Animation)

Ghee Happy "Navagraha" (Ghee Happy Studio)

Playdate with Winnie the Pooh "Piglet, Tigger and the Cardboard Box" (Oddbot)

StoryBots: Answer Time "Fractions" (JibJab Bros. Studios for Netflix)

The Creature Cases "The Forest Food Bandit" (Silvergate Media, TeamTO, Choice, Provisions, Netflix)

Best TV/Media, Children

Curses! "The Baboon Temple" (DreamWorks Animation)

Hilda "Chapter 8: The Fairy Isle" (Hilda Productions, Silvergate, Netflix, Mercury Filmworks)

Marvel's Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur "The Beyonder" (Flying Bark Productions, Disney TV Animation)

My Dad the Bounty Hunter "Bizarre Ride" (Netflix)

Shape Island "Square's Special Place" (Bix Pix Ent., Apple)

BEST TV/Media, Mature

Big Mouth "The International Show" (Netflix)

Blue Eye Samurai "Pilot: Hammerscale" (Netflix, 3 Arts Ent., Blue Spirit)

Bob's Burgers "Amelia" (20th Television Animation)

Scavengers Reign "The Signal" (Max, Titmouse Animation, Green Street)

Tomato Kitchen (Bilibili, Studio Reflection)



Best Student Film

From The Top. Rich Farris, Martina Buendia Silva (National Film and Television School)

Kolaj. Besen Dilek (Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg GmbH)

La quête de l'humain. Mélina Ienco, Lucie Juric, Caroline Leibel, Faustine Merle, Claire Pellet (Gobelins, l'école de l'image)

Quem Salva. Laure Devin, Maxime Bourstin, Nathan Medam, Charles Hechinger, Titouan Jaouen (Supinfocom Rubika)

The Little Poet. Justine King (California Institute of the Arts)

Best Director, TV/Media

Kizazi Moto: Generation Fire "Moremi." Shofela Coker, Andrew McNally

My Dad the Bounty Hunter "Bizarre Ride." Kenji Ono, Kai Akira, Patrick Harpin

Pokémon Concierge "What's on Your Mind, Psyduck?" Iku Ogawa

Scavengers Reign "The Fall." Diego Porral

Star Wars: Visions "Screecher's Reach." Paul Young

Best Direction, Feature

Nimona. Nick Bruno, Troy Quane

Robot Dreams. Pablo Berger, Benoît Ferroumont

Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse. Joaquim Dos Santos, Kemp Powers, Justin K. Thompson

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem.

Jeff Rowe, Kyler Spears

The Boy and the Heron. Hayao Miyazaki

Juried Awards

The Winsor McCay Award in recognition of lifetime or career contributions:

Legendary animator and director, **Charlotte "Lotte"**

Reiniger (posthumous)

Prolific Studio Ghibli composer, **Joe Hisaishi**

National Film Board animator and producer, **Marcy Page**

The June Foray Award: The BRIC Foundation, Alison Mann and Nicole Hendrix, co-founders.

The Ub Iwerks Award: John Oxberry (posthumous).

The Special Achievement Award: The Artists of Walt Disney Animation. ♦



You can find the full list of nominees in all categories at annieawards.org.

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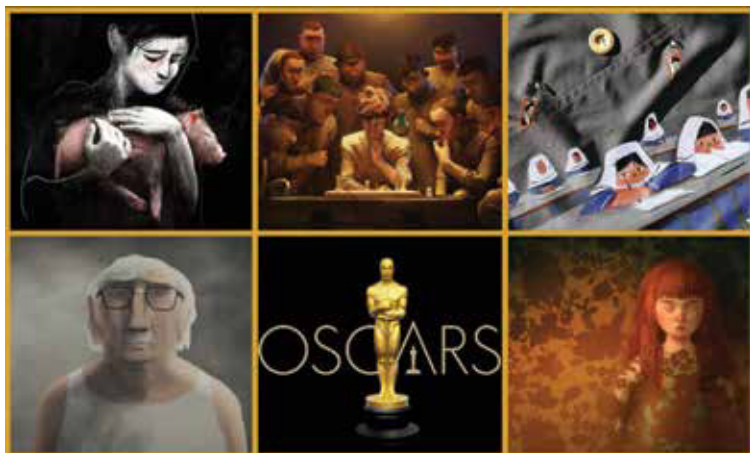
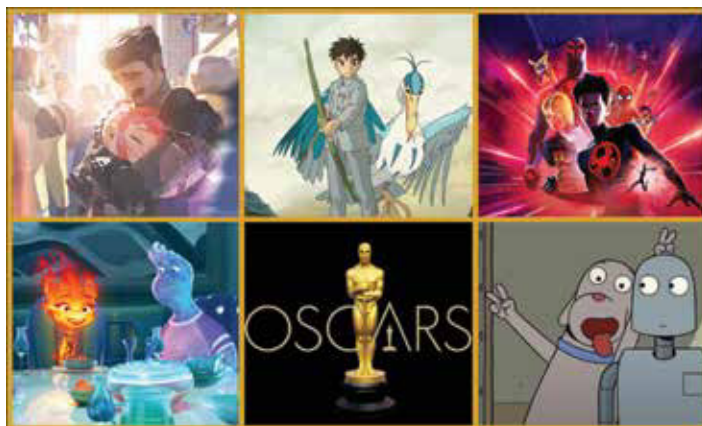


Your Animation and VFX Oscar Ballot!

**Congrats to all the nominees for the 96th Academy Awards.
Here are the animation and VFX contenders:**

Best Animated Feature:

- ☐ ***The Boy and the Heron*** (Director: Hayao Miyazaki)
Studio Ghibli/GKIDS
- ☐ ***Elemental*** (Director: Peter Sohn) Disney/Pixar
- ☐ ***Nimona*** (Directors: Nick Bruno, Troy Quane) Netflix
- ☐ ***Robot Dreams*** (Director: Pablo Berger) Arcadia/Neon
- ☐ ***Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*** (Directors:
Joaquim Dos Santos, Kemp Powers and Justin K. Thompson)
Sony Pictures Animation



Best Animated Short

- ☐ ***Letter to a Pig*** (Director: Tal Kantor)
- ☐ ***Ninety-Five Senses*** (Directors: Jared Jess and Jerusha Hess)
- ☐ ***Our Uniform*** (Directors: Yegane Moghaddam)
- ☐ ***Pachyderme*** (Director: Stéphanie Clément)
- ☐ ***War Is Over! Inspired by the Music of John and Yoko*** (Director:
Dave Mullins)

Best Visual Effects:

- ☐ ***The Creator*** (Jay Cooper, Ian Comley, Andrew Roberts and Neil Corbould)
- ☐ ***Godzilla Minus One*** (Takashi Yamazaki, Kiyoko Shibuya, Masaki Takahashi and Tatsuji Nojima)
- ☐ ***Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*** (Stephane Ceretti, Alexis Wajsbrot, Guy Williams and Theo Bialek)
- ☐ ***Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One*** (Alex Wuttke, Simone Coco, Jeff Sutherland and Neil Corbould)
- ☐ ***Napoleon*** (Charley Henley, Luc-Ewen Martin-Fenouillet, Simone Coco and Neil Corbould)



The 96th edition of the Academy Awards will be held on Sunday, March 10, beginning at 4 p.m. (PDT) at the Dolby Theatre at Hollywood & Highland Center in Hollywood, and will be televised live on ABC and in 200 countries worldwide. Jimmy Kimmel will host the ceremony for the fourth time. Visit oscars.org for the complete list of nominees.



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Canine Corner

Director Priit Tender discusses the art and influences behind his Oscar shortlisted project, *Dog Apartment*.

- By Jeff Spry -

Estonian director Priit Tender's animated short *Dog Apartment* is one of 15 titles that landed on the Academy Awards' Best Animated Short shortlist this year. The surreal, stop-motion project from the animation veteran has already won the top prizes at the London Int'l Animation Festival and Animateka, and was nominated for a Cristal at Annecy last year.

What immediately comes to mind after viewing this imaginative curiosity is whether you're watching a dog dreaming it's an apartment, or if this humble abode is dreaming it's a dog. No matter how you interpret this animated treat, Tender has crafted a beautifully detailed world where a former ballet dancer named Sergei deals with the strange situation of living inside a top-floor unit that displays all the mannerisms and characteristics of a furry, barking pooch. When mealtime rolls around, Sergei drives off toward the local butcher shop, past a wasteland decimated of its trees by a hatchet-headed rooster.

With absurdist nods to David Lynch's *Eraserhead*, ShadowMachine's *Robot Chicken* and the Brothers Quay, this highly original stop-motion jewel hails from Estonia's Nukufilm, the world's oldest continually operated stop-motion studio.

Soviet Surrealism

It's natural to think that the genesis for this project was a series of bizarre dreams or nightmares brought on by a tainted meal, but its origins actually have a literary seed.

"The film was inspired by a poem — *To Be a Dog-Apartment* by Estonian surrealist Andres Ehin," Tender explains. "I translated his game of words into characters and created my own



narrative for them. So, no nightmares this time, only Soviet surrealism."

Surrealism is used here in all its disturbing shades to seduce viewers into *Dog Apartment*'s lunacy for a memorable escape. "There's an aspect of surprise when you use hyperrealism and all of a sudden mix it with some dreamlike elements," says the director, whose past animated projects *Vares ja hiired*, *Orpheus*, *Frank & Wendy* and *Kitchen Dimensions* have also received prizes at the Annecy, Hiroshima and Encounters festivals through the years. "The same classic principle worked in the early days of surrealism, and it works now as well."

Stop motion is a painfully precise art form to work within. Yet, Tender considered it to be a stronger medium to deliver the world and themes he had conjured up in his head after reading Andres Ehin's poetry.

"The world of 2D animation is full of metamorphosis, squash and stretch and all other

shapeshifting tricks," he adds. "To replicate the similar effects with real materials (the barking sink, for instance) was a challenge worth taking. The final result came as a combination of 2D thinking and stop-motion executing.

"Before the film, I was contemplating on the theme of nostalgia quite a lot. Like some older people who have good memories of the Soviet times (which were actually horrible). What is this phenomenon of sweetening up the past that our brain produces over time? Building the realistic, Soviet-looking sets and having a main character who used to be a stage star in his past was an exploration of nostalgia for me."

Tender's 14-minute short being named to the Oscars' shortlist carried with it great creative joy and a symbolic prophecy unveiled in deep slumber.

"A few days before the shortlist announcement I had a dream," Tender recalls. "I was walking by the Japanese coastline with a



TWISTED TAIL: Priit Tender's surreal stop-motion short *Dog Apartment* was one of the 15 animated shorts that landed on this year's Oscar shortlist.



'There's an aspect of surprise when you use hyperrealism and all of a sudden mix it with some dreamlike elements.'

- Director Priit Tender

friend and suddenly a lot of seals came out of the sea. They were black and wet and shimmering in the sunshine, playing around on the beach. I woke up with a happy feeling. I think this dream predicted the good news about getting into the shortlist, so I was not too surprised. I tend to take my dreams seriously."

The unsettling film's overall concept came with several practical obstacles to define its tone, emotions and direction, something the Estonian filmmaker tackled with a rare gusto.

"It's an act of constructivism: For dog-apartment, you just mix an apartment and a dog; for a rooster-axe, a rooster and an axe also," the director explains. "And finally, if you have a house that behaves like a dog you come out with a logic question – what and how does this dog eat? And then you invent a man who lives in that house and takes care of it. Finally, you come up with a sad story that fits him. I don't easily get inspiration from animations, more from documentaries and live-action films."

Dog Apartment's sense of scale is what sells this weird environment, and Tender made sure that he employed the full scope of the historic studio's workspace. The care and attention paid while constructing the puppets resulted in a professionally rendered yearlong endeavor.

"I wanted to have a huge landscape on which a human being seems tiny and insignificant," Tender says. "That's why we used the maximum space that the Nukufilm studio could offer – 6x6 meters for the big set. I modeled the heads of the puppets in plasticine, then the puppet builder took it over and cast it to silicon [and] made the metal structure also. It took a while to find the right kind of fabric for the suit of the main character, as he had to be able to dance and his clothes had to be elegant but also flexible. There are a million details to make a proper film puppet."

Adding to the absorbing elements of *Dog Apartment* is the freaky film's rich soundscape and sound effects that range from the oddly

discordant to the randomly familiar.

"The sets are built with great realism, so I wanted the soundscape to be something close to a documentary film rather than animation," he notes. "For a documentary you just record the sound on location, but in animation it took a lot of labor and endless sound layers to build such an environment out of nothing. I chose to use music only in specific places where it comes from a car radio or someone playing cello. *Swan Lake* heard in the cowshed is the only musical moment in the film and is thus meant to work as a stronger contrast to the mundane sounds."

For Tender, the most gratifying aspect of this production was the generous creative support from his team members and the collective enthusiasm at Nukufilm. And, of course, seeing the end result of the film. "It took a while to get there, but I was happy," he concludes. ♦

Visit nukufilm.ee/en/arhiiv/dogflat for more information.

Yuasa marches to the beat of a different drummer (or rhythm section), mixing genres, styles and media with a seemingly effortless facility.

continued from page 30

group of students sets out for a night on the town in Kyoto. The heroine, known only as The Girl with Black Hair, is eager to explore the adult world, especially the world of alcohol. The plot lurches along unsteadily, like The Girl herself after her umpteenth cocktail, although everything is resolved happily. Yuasa once again uses Flash for interesting, if sometimes odd, effects. The musical numbers impede the fragmented storyline, but Yuasa still manages to generate sympathy for the heroine as she encounters a succession of off-kilter, often bizarre individuals.

In many ways Yuasa's most conventional feature, the fantasy-romance *Ride Your Wave* (2019) adds a greater emotional resonance to his brightly colored, minimalist visual style. Hinako may be a klutz on land, but she's a skilled surfer. When she moves to a small beach town for college, she falls for the gentle first responder Minato, who rescues



her from an apartment fire. After he is killed in an accident at sea, Hinako believes she can make him appear in any watery surface by singing their favorite song. Eventually, Hinako realizes she must let go of the past. Inspired by Minato's selfless devotion to help anyone in need, she becomes a lifeguard – and a capable, independent young woman.

Yuasa's Golden Globe-nominated *Inu-Oh* (2022) ranks as his most complex work to date. Based on a novel by Hideo Furukawa, *Inu-Oh* ("Dog-King"), draws on two pillars of traditional Japanese culture: *The Tale of the Heike*, an epic account of the great 12th century Japanese civil war; and Noh drama, an exquisite, recherché court art form that was established in the 14th century.

The title character is the son of the leader of the foremost Noh troupe in Japan. Because his father struck a deal with a demon to achieve that fame, Inu-Oh is born grotesquely

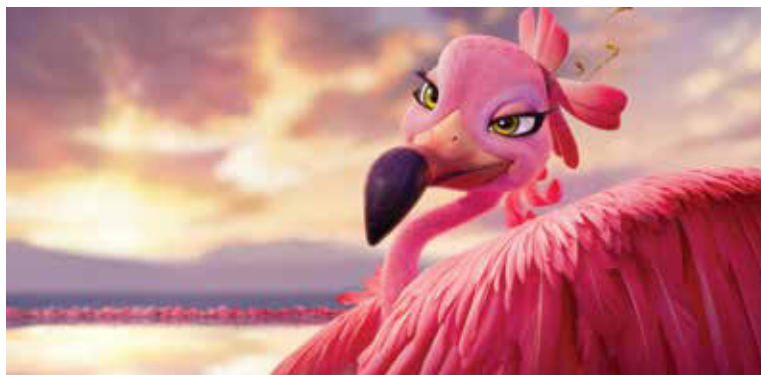
deformed. His limbs are of uneven lengths and his face is so hideous that he's forced to wear a wooden mask. But as he learns to dance, Inu-Oh's body transforms, assuming beautiful human proportions. He and his blind musician friend, Tomona, join forces to become 14th century pop stars, playing to wildly cheering crowds. In contrast to the flailing dances in his earlier works, Yuasa adds accurately observed classical ballet, gymnastics and break dancing moves to Inu-Oh's performances.

The "Five Films" set comes loaded with extras, including a poster, a booklet, interviews, voice-over commentaries, trailers, character designs and two short films, *Happy Machine* (2007) and *Kick-Heart* (2013). For viewers weary of the familiar plots and overused, over-rendered look of so many recent animated features, Masaaki Yuasa's work offers an uncompromisingly individual vision. ♦

Masaaki Yuasa: Five Films (Shout! Studios: \$99.98 (six discs, Blu-ray) is currently available for purchase.

Pretty in Pink!

Studio 100's colorful new project, *Flamingo Flamenco*, features an unforgettable feathered heroine and a positive message.



A fun, flamenco-dancing flamingo finds her true calling in Studio 100 Media's charming new CG-animated feature, *Flamingo Flamenco*. The movie, which is being showcased at the European Film Market this month is written by Rob Sprackling (*Gnomeo and Juliet*, *The Queen's Corgi*).

Thorsten Wegener, director of business operations and producer at Studio 100 Media, tells us the pitch for the movie was so great that it immediately caught his attention. "We met Rob in Bordeaux at the Cartoon Movie event in 2020," he says. "He pitched us the project and we knew instantly that we wanted to take it on."

Wegener, whose many credits include *Mia and me: The Hero of Centopia* and the recent *Maya the Bee* movies, believes *Flamin-*

her much-loved older sister when the flock is attacked by a hateful pack of *podencos* (Spanish hunting dogs) whilst doing their annual courting dance. Consequently, the dance is cancelled to protect the flock. Rosie grows up a shadow of her former self, robbed of the love of her sister and her means of expression. Then, when a carefree, exuberant lizard named Carlos encourages her to dance once again, it rekindles her inner flame. She soon transforms back into her old confident self, falls in love, and then leads her flock to face down the podencos and dance once again.

"The movie was conceived and written by acclaimed screenwriter Rob Sprackling, who has also created and wrote the original screenplays for the \$200 million grossing *Gnomeo & Juliet* and the \$50 million grossing

Spain — which is home to the second biggest flock of flamingos in Europe — will ensure the film is a visual treat for the audience. Finally, this film is all about dance as a means of expressing your true emotions, so the animation needs to capture all that beauty, passion, and magic. 3D animation feels like the

best way to bring this to life, in a bold style, not dissimilar to the Blue Sky movie, *Rio*."

Wegener and his team hope the film will appeal to audiences on several levels. "For one, it is a joyful, moving, love story, filled with music and dance," he says. "On another, it is the tale of a young girl, who, having suffered personal trauma, learns to rekindle the flame in her heart and dance again. Finally, it is the story of a migrant flock who must fight for their right to remain in their beloved adopt-home. It will be a funny, exciting, romantic visual spectacle that will lift the heart, along with an important message — the acceptance of other cultures and the power of the spirit to overcome adversity." ♦

Flamingo Flamenco is set for delivery in the fourth quarter of 2026. The script is already finished, and the design work is underway this spring. It will be produced by Studio 100 Media in Germany with co-producer 3Doubles in Spain. For more info, visit studio100film.com

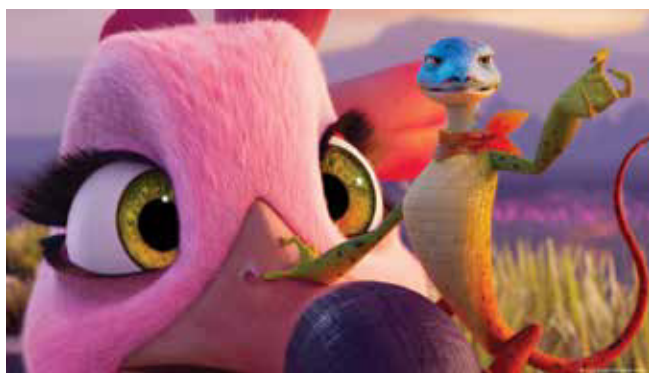
go Flamenco has an exceptional quality that makes it stand out in the extremely competitive animation landscape. "It delivers on many levels for a family audience," he explains. "It's a great story, the characters are rich and engaging. It has bags of comedy but is also very moving at times and the music and dance make it a really entertaining visual and aural treat. And finally, who doesn't love flamingos? They must be one of the most unique, graceful, and iconic creatures on earth, it seems almost bizarre that nobody has made an animated film about them before!"

Overcoming Adversity

Flamingo Flamenco centers on Rosie, a fun, uninhibited, dance-crazy bird, who loses

The Queen's Corgi," says Wegener. "He has a great track record of creating hits and across an award-winning career has worked with most major Hollywood studios and for many years at Aardman Animations in the U.K., working on movies such as *Shaun the Sheep* and *Early Man*. He creates original stories with heart and humor and is a master storyteller."

The producer also notes that the subject matter of the movie (pink flamingos) demands a vibrant colour palette. He adds, "Also, the backdrop of the exotic Fuente de Piedra lagoon in Andalucia,



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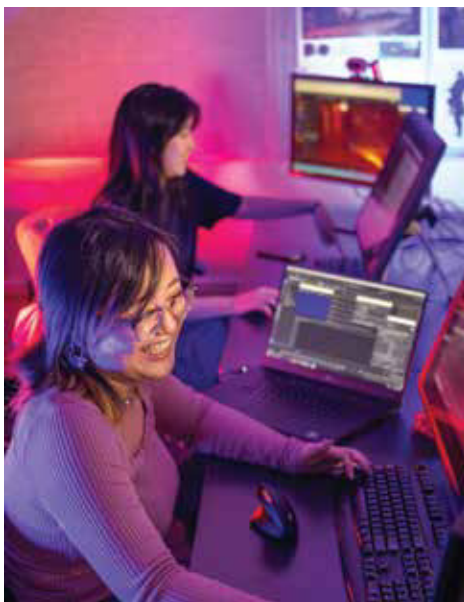
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Unlocking Creative Horizons

SJSU's Master of Design, Specialization in Animation in the Heart of Silicon Valley

Raquel Coelho, Program Director of the Master of Design Animation Program at San José State University, and Virginia San Fratello, Design Department Chair, discuss the school's innovative and state-of-the-art educational approach:

SJSU SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY



Can you tell us a bit about the Master of Design, Animation program at SJSU?

Our vision for this program is to support new voices in animation. We are interested in students with unique and original ideas for new TV shows, short films, or video games, and we want to nurture their ideas and elevate them to a higher professional level. In parallel, we also want to equip students with a solid understanding of digital tools widely used in animation. We want our students to use digital technology creatively to produce their content, exploring unique styles and narratives.



Why was the program established, and what makes it unique?

We have a very successful B.F.A in animation and illustration program. Our alumni work in the best animation studios in the U.S. and abroad. For a long time, we wanted to broaden our program offerings to include a master's degree program. The primary motivation was to have a space dedicated to encouraging the development of students' original ideas and have a strong focus on the creation of new and groundbreaking content for animation, with a second focus on digital tools and technology. The Department of Design at San José State University has decided to start the first Master of Design program in the California State University system. SJSU is uniquely located in Silicon Valley and is known as Silicon Valley's public university.

Who makes up your faculty?

The animation program at SJSU currently has

several faculty who work in the industry. We also hire lecturers who come from animation studios in the Bay Area and California at large. Our faculty are seasoned industry professionals and independent filmmakers. We are very rigorous when hiring faculty, as we want to offer students the best possible classroom experience, one that is hands-on, well-informed, and connects our students to opportunities in the field.

How do you prepare students for the brave new world of animation when they graduate?

Students participating in the Master of Design, Animation program will have access to industry-standard equipment and software, including robotics, 3D printers, AR and VR setups, and computer labs. Our program is very well connected to the animation industry. Students will have access to monthly presentations with industry professionals and recruiters - broadening our students' networking and portfolio review opportunities. Students will also have an industry mentor to help them with their capstone projects. We also offer guidance on creating a solid package when looking for jobs, including a strong portfolio, a well-written resumé and interview skills. In addition, we have a strong alum community, most of whom work in the field and support our current students.

What kind of advice can you give prospective students who want to apply to your program?

We advise that you prepare an excellent portfolio and carefully craft a pre-proposal for your final project. The pre-proposal gives us an idea of the creative project you want to develop. We are interested in students with original ideas, a vision, a personal style, and the desire to create something - a short film, a game, a pilot for a TV show... something they are passionate about creating. That project might completely change during the two years of the master's, but it will show us your interests and ideas. We want students who have a passion for the field and want to bring their own stories to life.

Do you offer job placement support to your students?

We offer guidance on putting together a site, a portfolio, a resumé, interview preparation, and contracts. We often connect our students with recruiters and recommend our best students to them. In addition, we often bring industry speakers to campus, providing students with networking opportunities.



What would you like our readers to know about SJSU's Master of Design, Animation program?

We want them to know that we offer real opportunities for students to develop their ideas and stories, hands-on training in digital tools, and several opportunities to interface with industry professionals. Our community is welcoming, our professors know the industry, and we offer a professional-level degree program to set you up for success in the animation field. ♦

For more info, visit sjsu.edu/design/graduate-programs/animation-master

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study.sjsu.edu/MDes_2024A

Master of Design, Specialization in Animation

SJSU SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY



Charting a Crash Course

A look at the realistic VFX details of J.A. Bayona's acclaimed feature *Society of the Snow*.

- By Trevor Hogg -



Re-creating a modern disaster on the screen can be a tricky affair. Such was the case with director J. A. Bayona's adaptation of Pablo Vierci's book *Society of the Snow*, which documents the Andes flight disaster of 1972 in which the survivors of Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571 had to endure 72 days of wintry conditions before their rescue. The filmmaker tapped visual effects supervisors Laura Pedro and Félix Bergés to oversee the digital augmentation of 900 shots for the Netflix survival thriller, which included

producing a mountain range environment and a dramatic plane crash.

"Laura was always with the main unit, and I was more with the second unit where I have a lot of experience capturing material," explains Bergés. "The previs was designed together, and in postproduction we split the shots in half."

According to the duo, their responsibilities were interchangeable. "We were like one person because Félix and I were thinking in the same way, so at the end it was easy for us to work together," notes Laura Pedro. "During the process we were mixing [our roles] the whole time."

The creators adopted two different ap-

proaches for principal photography. "The accident was a technical shoot where we did a lot of previs, while J.A. wanted to do the rest of the movie in an organic way," states Bergés. "Laura and I put no restrictions on him."

One of the film's most important symbolic images is of the passengers' families watching their loved ones fly away with the plane reflected in the top lefthand corner. "The power of your visual effects is proportionate to the idea," observes Bergés. "It's always good to work [with] J.A. because he has a lot of good ideas."

Mission: Maximum Realism

The team relied on photographic elements for the backgrounds to ground the visual effects within the real world. "In that sense, *Society of the Snow* is 100% photographic," explains Bergés. "The only fully CG shots are of the plane going through the clouds. We used a lot of details to put more scale. And that was exactly the same for the Valley of Tears."

Traveling to the actual site of the accident was a crucial decision. "We had to be there to be able to understand the dimensions and scale of mountains," says Pedro. "Since we went there with J.A. and the DP [Pedro Luque],

it was easier to know which type of shots work better to cinematically convey a prison with enormous walls."

The duo says that there was room for visual experimentation. "One of the most beautiful scenes was done with a macro probe lens where everything is completely deformed, but to change the background for these types of lenses was difficult," says Bergés. "However, when it works it is amazing. The camera language of this movie is one of the best things. I saw it with my 16-year-old nephew, and he said, 'This is like a documentary; it has something that is true.' The main goal for all of the departments was to be real."

Three sets were used for the plane crash. "The first one is an entire plane from the beginning of the sequence to the initial turbulence," reveals Pedro. "This part of the sequence is 100% real; there are no visual effects at all. The second set was the broken fuselage where we can make the most extreme movements and turbulence. The third set is for the end of the sequence when the plane crashes and everything collapses and the bodies in the seats collide with each other."

The production mixed various techniques



'One of the most beautiful scenes was done with a macro probe lens where everything is completely deformed, but to change the background for these types of lenses was difficult.'

— VFX supervisor Félix Bergés

to get the best results. "We had stunt performers, actors and dummies," says Bergés. "Every shot was different [to confuse the eye] because if you have five or 10 shots in a row [of the same technique] then you'll say, 'One stunt performer, one dummy and three actors.'" Pedro adds, "We tried to mix stunts, special effects and visual effects to find the perfect way for each shot."

One of the film's most terrifying sequences depicts passengers in the backseats flying out of the open fuselage. "The beginning of the shot was two different plates," reveals Pedro. "We shot the plate with the three guys who fall out and the second plate with the actors in front. Those were mixed together. When the crash happens, we replaced this with CG. But the beginning of the shot is real with the actual actors."

This approach was commonplace in the production. "The beginning is actors or stunts, and the end are digital doubles," remarks Bergés. "You see the actor, and when the movement is very fast, then we make a change to a digital double."

Pedro points out that continuity was never an issue with editorial. "Since we planned the whole accident in previsualization, we shot exactly what J.A. wanted, so the accident is more or less the same since the first day until now in the film," she says. "We only shot what was needed."

The crash site scenes were captured elsewhere. "In the mountains, we knew that there were going to be a lot of days with bad weather, so we made a set of 60 meters of snow in a parking lot," recalls Bergés. "It was small, but enough."

LED screens were preferred over greenscreens, which would have contaminated the white snow with green spill. Pedro explains, "The material that we put on the LED screens were the original pictures from the valley, so the light was real."

Unsurprisingly, there was a lot of snow to be simulated. We had a crew of 200 on set with the footprints accumulating over the course of shooting. The most technically challenging part was the snow surrounding the actors which had to be changed a lot of times. The footprints were tricky because you had to be precise."

Details on Ice

The solution was found in the plate photography. "It was easy, in a way, for us," notes Pedro, "because we had a lot of footage of real snow in the same mountain, so we could take some parts to produce the same snow in CG."

Cold breaths were also inserted into 200 shots. "We did a plate shoot of Laura's breaths in the cafeteria. On the top of the mountain

there is a lot of humidity and [it] is below zero. It's a good place to make steam, and Laura is a perfect source of steam," says Pedro.

El Ranchito VFX was the main vendor with additional support provided Glassworks, Lamppost VFX, Miopia FX and Twin Pines. "El Ranchito designed an asset of the backgrounds in an easy way to share with the other vendors, because in the beginning we knew that more help would be needed," remarks Pedro. "Also, they worked with an application that we built with El Ranchito based on Unreal Engine. It showed inside the valley and the geometry of the Sierra Nevada so they could move the camera in this application and see where we were in the Valley of Tears. Because of this, they were able to work without us."

The most complex shot was the final one of the plane crashing. "The total number of shots is 35,920!" says Bergés with a laugh. "In two years, I will be comfortable in watching the accident. The same thing happened to me when we did *The Impossible* and *A Monster Calls*. Another challenge was designing the valley in a realistic way. We made a good decision to make everything photographic. Now it seems easy, but it wasn't that easy!" ♦

***Society of the Snow* is currently streaming on Netflix.**



REBUILDING RECENT HISTORY: Among the 900 VFX shots supervised by Laura Pedro and Félix Bergés were digital augmentation of scenes using greenscreen and a CG simulation of the film's pivotal plane crash.



Tech Reviews

- By Todd Sheridan Perry -



Procreate Dreams

Procreate for the iPad has been around for a few years and has created a niche for itself for on-the-go designers and illustrators. Recently, the same team has expanded into animation and developed Procreate Dreams.

As of this writing, the app is still in its nascent form and is missing some key features one would expect of a full-fledged animation system. That said, a good number of these are on their development forecast for the future. So, let's take a look at what's in it so far.

One of the first things to note is that this new release takes many of the favorite features from Procreate and migrates them into

video of a performer to rotoscope. Or, if you are already a Procreate user, you can drag-and-drop your Procreations right into Dreams.

One of the most innovative features is Performance Mode, which gives you the option of dragging layers or parameters around in real time and recording the actions. So, you can have an animation going on at one layer and then drag something else around in response to the other animation. You can also quickly block things out and tweak them later. Of course, if you are a hardcore traditionalist, you can also do your keyframe thing!

I could start digging into the items that I feel are missing, but you can take five minutes and just look at the app reviews to find common themes among the user base. You will also find that the development team is extremely responsive to those user reviews, which tells me they are listening.

Seriously, with a price tag of only \$19.99, what have you got to lose? If you want to create some cool-looking hand-drawn animation, or if you are just starting

out and you need something to hone your walk-cycle skills you learned from reading Preston Blair books, this will take you a long way. And it'll just keep getting better!

Website: procreate.com

Price: \$19.99

Maxon's Cinema 4D 2024

To round out the journey through the Maxon One suite that I started a few months ago (see our archives), I'm taking a look at the Maxon flagship: Cinema 4D 2024. Topping the list of highlights is something that isn't a spicy new tool, but it's more important than those hot tools — the actual performance. With new core code, 2024 is markedly faster (up to 2x) than previous versions. Many of your scenes may see realistic, real-time playback without the viewport. Such features as simulations are more stable to boot (more on that shortly).

Cinema 4D's Unified Simulation System has Rigid Body Simulations to work with now. It's

like Vellum for those coming from the Houdini world. All dynamic systems, including ropes, cloth, soft bodies and Pyro (Cinema 4D's fluid simulation engine — fluids, not liquids) can work together and interact with each other. This interactivity is so critical for good simulations.

Speaking of Pyro, additional parameters have been added to better control your fire and smoke. For those who have played with any fluid simulators, there are already *quite a lot of* controls. But believe me: Additions like timing parameters to easily adjust smoke and temperature rates are incredibly time saving. Also, Pyro can now be applied to particle systems and matrix cloners, which, as anyone who works in vfx knows, we almost always guide the initial structure of an explosion or burn with particles that then drive the fire. Furthermore, you can easily iterate and save simulations at lower resolutions to get client-signoff, and then Up-Res the simulation for final renders.

Cinema 4D has always had strong modeling tools, and 2024 adds some powerful ones. Select Pattern gives you the ability to select a small pattern of faces on a mesh, and then repeat and expand that pattern across the whole mesh, which you can then apply operators on like extrusions or deleting them — a huge time saver. Then, the super powerful Projection Deformer projects points from one object to the surface of another. And the VAMP manager has also been updated to transfer UV and weight maps from on mesh to another. The Node UI has been updated as well, and not just with some new nodes for parametric modeling; the entire UX has been refined for increased readability and usability. Scaffolds (which Nuke users would call "backdrops") can be used to organize and label groups of



Dreams — specifically, the wide variety of brushes. These respond to touch, but you are going to get the best results using an Apple Pencil.

The user interface has a great design and feels good to work with. By using drag methods, you can scroll around your animation or pinch in and out to zoom into specific frames on specific tracks. You can also minimize the timeline down to just a little flipbook to give you maximum drawing real estate. And the flipbook can sit under your thumb as you flip back and forth with one hand, while your other hand does the drawing. Other functions are accessed through multi-finger taps and swipes.

The layer system is intuitive and will be recognizable to anyone who has used Photoshop, Premiere, After Effects, Toon Boom or any given graphic editing system. You can add additional layers to animate on, or to bring some footage for a background on a bottom layer and animate above it. You can even bring in





nodes, ideally to cluster them into a logical function, such as “Check Motion Capture Data” or “Generate Text Objects.” You can also add a node to the scaffold by just dragging it in. And notes (like Sticky Notes) can also be added to annotate your node graph. I cannot express in less stern terms how important it is to keep your nodes clean and readable — not just in case someone else has to open your file, but also if *you* have to reopen your file in two months and find yourself staring at it, trying to remember what you were thinking.

In short, there are lots of good features for the C4D users out there, and it all comes as part of the Maxon One suite or your C4D subscription.

Website: maxon.net/cinema-4d

Price: \$1,399 per year

Maxon's Redshift

Redshift is Maxon's GPU rendering engine, and as of 2024 it is the default renderer for Cinema 4D, with an emphasis on integrating the render workflow even more seamlessly in the C4D environment. For instance, when importing external 3D files like OBJ, FBX and USD, you can opt to have the materials be converted to native Redshift materials. The same is true for when you are exporting — simplified versions of the Redshift shader will be export-



ed so that the other 3D software can import more smoothly. Yes, you'll have to tweak some in this process, but this interchange makes things much less complicated.

New and/or improved shaders are also a thing with the latest builds of Redshift. One that I find particularly powerful is the interaction with Substance Designer created shader nodes. When importing, you will have deep controls over the parameters, but you also have direct interaction with the parameters that you (or the designer of the shader) have promoted to be accessible to the artists using it.

Another cool feature is a jitter node that can be used in your shader tree to create color variations with objects that are using the same shader — reducing complexity of the scene, as well as memory and computation overhead.

A MatCap node is also new to Redshift, which allows you to drive the look of a ren-

der not from lights but from images. The image used is wrapped around the object via world, camera or normal space with traditional transforms to tweak the look. The result gives you a very stylized non-photoreal look. However, you don't need to use it on its own; you can feed the shader into

a more standard shader so your MatCap is the base, but you also benefit from regular lights.

Cinema 4D's Distorter node has migrated to Redshift and has been expanded so that you can use 3D distortion using Maxon Noise and bump maps as well as traditional color inputs to distort UV space in textures.

Let's not forget that Redshift isn't exclusive to Cinema 4D. It is a near-agnostic renderer that is also supported for Maya, Max, Houdini, Katana, Hydra (in general) and Blender. And the Redshift team is extremely diligent in consistently pushing out new builds with features and fixes all the time.

Website: maxon.net/redshift

Price: \$22 per month, \$264 per year ♦

Todd Sheridan Perry is an award-winning VFX supervisor and digital artist whose credits include *I'm a Virgo*, *For All Mankind* and *Black Panther*. You can reach him at teaspoonvfx.com.

ANIMATION MAGAZINE

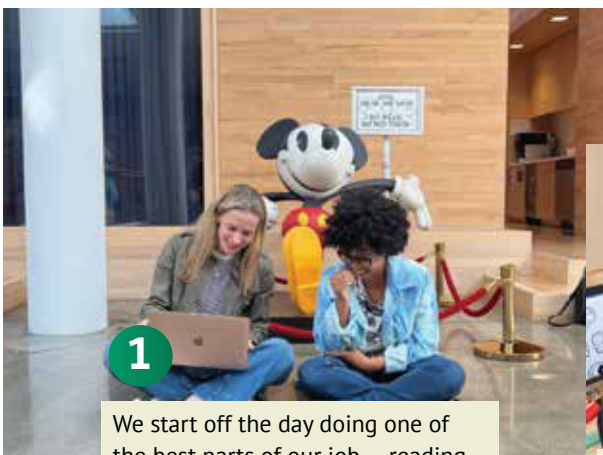
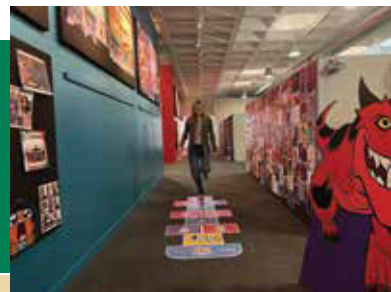
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It's not every day when you get to peek inside a typical day in the lives of the creative forces behind the popular series ***Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur***, which started its second season on Disney+ this month. The show's story editor and co-exec producer **Kate Kondell** and story editor and co-producer **Halima Lucas** were kind enough to invite us to their offices this month.



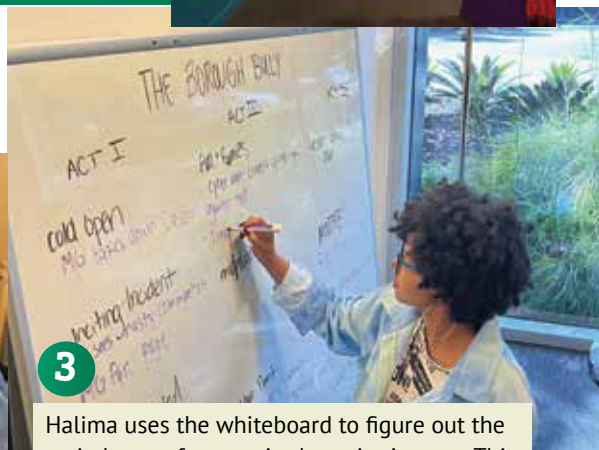
1

We start off the day doing one of the best parts of our job — reading material from the writers, who never let us down on the laughs.



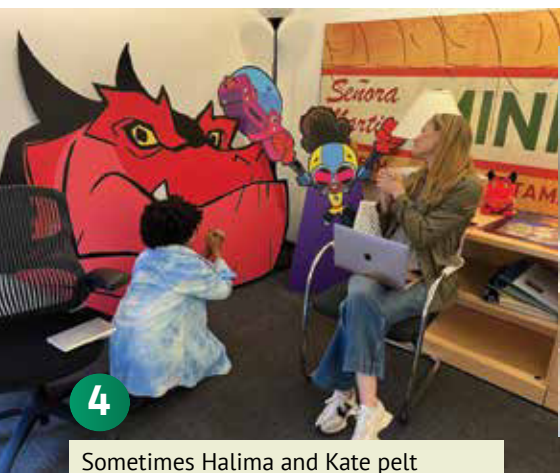
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Halima and the show's director Jose Lopez are in the middle of what they call a "Drawing Jam Sesh" where they brainstorm a new look for Moon Girl!



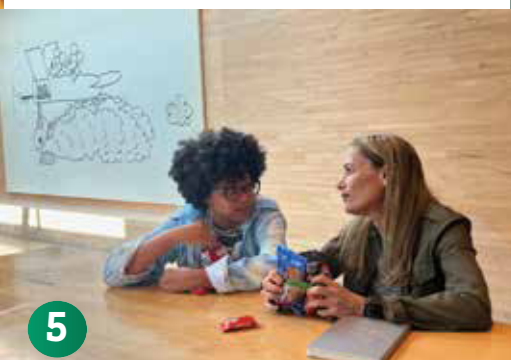
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Halima uses the whiteboard to figure out the main beats of a story in the writer's room. This is where the most important element of each episode — the theme — is discussed.



4

Sometimes Halima and Kate pelt Devil Dinosaur and Moon Girl with questions like, "What would you do in this scenario?!" and, "What color is your blush if you're already red?!"



5

Most of the rest of our day is spent toiling through story questions, looking for answers and trying to desperately break writers block. We even search for a midpoint twist at the bottom of a Cheez-It bag.



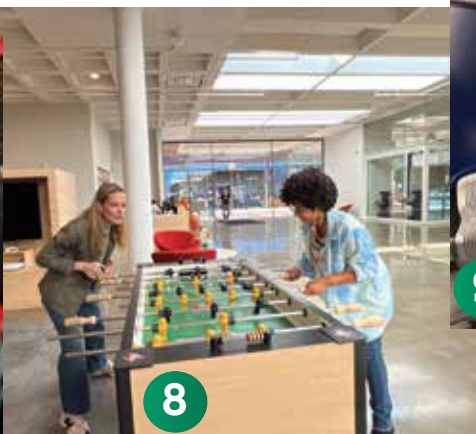
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At some point, we remember that story heroes need a break, too, and go outside to de-stress in the meditation garden.



7

One of the most essential part of the writing process is good ol' fun.



8

....and friendly procrastination to help us break a story!



9

After a hard day's work, we celebrate getting things across the finish line and on schedule! Pictured, from left, exec producer Pilar Flynn, Kate Kondell, Halima Lucas, co-exec producer Rodney Clouden, exec producer Steve Loter and producer Rafael Chaidez.



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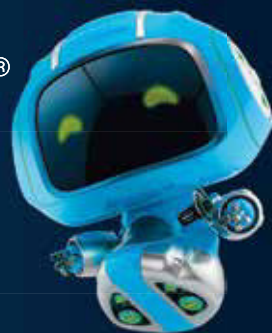
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